Arifureta Volume 08

Chapter 1 : Versus Demon Race I

The red-haired woman of the Demon race who appeared before Kouki's party revealed a cold smile as she looked at Kouki's party who had widened eyes with surprise.

Similar to her hair, the color of her eyes were also red, and she wore a dull-black rider suit-like clothing. Its design was fitting to her body, so her splendid curves could be seen well even in the dim dungeon. Moreover, there was the opening on the chest area, where the splendid twin hills seemed like it was going to spill out at any time. Furthermore, her flowing hair behind her, and her characteristically slightly pointed ears was truly captivating. Most of the male students were blushing even though they know it wasn't the right time.

"You are the hero, right? Yes, you, the one wearing a stupidly sparkling armor."

"St-Stupid… sh-shut up! I won't accept being called stupid by someone from Demon race! Besides, why would a person from the Demon race be in a place like this!?"

Kouki spoke without thinking, and used his slight anger to recover from his surprise, questioning the purpose of the woman of the Demon race.

However, the Demon race woman thought of Kouki's question as annoying and ignored it. Then, she very reluctantly continued saying.

"Haa~ Even though this is absolutely unneeded… Well, this is an order after all… You, I mean the overly sparkling one. Won't you come to our side?"

"Wh-What did you say? Come to your… what do you mean!?"

"Looks like your comprehensive ability is rather low. The meaning is exactly as I said. An invitation for Mr. Hero. I want you to come to our side. There are various preferential treatments, too, you know?"

Time was needed for Kouki's party to completely understand the unexpected words. Then, the classmates looked at Kouki, who glared at the woman from Demon race with strained and disgusted expression. It was then when they understood what she meant.

"I refuse! How dare you… asking me to betray… Human race… my comrades and the people of this Kingdom! It's exactly as I heard; the Demon race is an evil

existence! You purposely came her to invite me, but for you to come alone is too foolish! We have the numbers. So, surrender now!"

Kouki's words made the other classmates felt at ease. They thought Kouki would definitely refuse it, but they could not deny that they were slightly worried about it. However, his childhood friends, Ryuutarou and Shizuku, didn't even worry about it.

On the other side, the woman of the Demon race didn't even pay any attention to the immediate refusal, and she muttered, "I see." In fact, when Kouki's shouted his reply, it annoyed her.

"Well, my superior also said it was okay for your comrades to come with you, you know? So how about it?"

"My answer is still the same! No matter what you say, I absolutely won't betray Human race!"

Without discussing with his comrades, the representative, Kouki, immediately answered as such. And as though implying the invitation was something unpleasant, Kouki activated the Holy Sword, which then became cladded in light. *There's no more need for discussion, and I will use force if you don't surrender!*

Behind him, Nagayama and Shizuku clicked their tongues in secret as they took maximum precaution to their surroundings over the Demon race woman. Considering their situation, the two contemplated to change the location even if they must lie to the Demon race woman. However, Kouki had already answered in anger before they could bring up their idea. Since it could not be helped now, they prepared for anything unexpected to happen.

But if they thought about it, normally, no matter how adept the Demon race were in using magic, they would not come to such a place alone. It was even more unbelievable that she flawlessly manage to annihilate the demonic beasts in the current floor, in addition to not leaving a single trace. If the Demon race was so strong, and she was able to achieve all that, then they would have already trampled the Human race by now.

Besides, the Demon race woman didn't even break a sweat when she reached this floor ahead of the 15 humans. Thinking of how she concealed the signs of combat, it made one fear thinking something laid in wait since they step into the floor, and one would think she had the geographical advantage. It would not be strange if something happen.

The crisis the two had sensed was immediately proven to be correct.

"I see. Then, I won't ask any more. Also let me say this… to invite you is not my main priority, so don't even think of something naive like I won't kill you. Lutos, Havell, Enki. It's time to eat!"

The Demon race woman called out three names and, *CRAAASH!* Sound of something crushed echoed along with Shizuku and Nagayama's anguished voices when they were blown away at the same time.

"Guh!?"
"Gah!?"

It was not known what blew the two away. With the order of the woman of the Demon race, they sensed the left and right spaces of Kouki's party suddenly blurred. There were "existences" approaching them with speed comparable to "Ground Shrinker," and attacked the unprepared classmates who were watching the conversation between Kouki and the woman of the Demon race.

Even with Shizuku and Nagayama's maximum precaution from the very beginning, they were barely able to notice the surprise attack, and they stood to protect the students who were suddenly the aim of their invisible enemy.

Shizuku was a speedfighter, so her defense is low. Therefore, she drew her swords into a cross towards the blurring space, and tried to jump back to dull the force when she received the impact. However, the enemy's attack power was far greater than she had imagined, so her defense was broken, and she was thrown to the ground, sucking all the air in her lungs. There was even shallow cut on her abdomen.

Nagayama was a "Great Martial Artist," which owned special aptitude towards defense even among hand-to-hand fighter class. He had acquired the skill derived from "Body Strengthening" called "Body Hardening," which was similar to "Vajra," and both skills had great credibility as they were far stronger than a steel shield. Coupled by his huge figure, his hard to break through defend made him suitable to be called a human fortress.

However, even Nagayama had his defense broken through by that "existence," and was blown away while splattering blood from his deeply wounded arms. He barely escaped the additional damage of crashing into the ground by chance, and landed on Hiyama's gang who was in the rear.

The glass cracking-like crushed sounds came from the barrier magic Suzu had chanted beforehand; similar to how Shizuku took maximum caution. It was something she did immediately when she instinctively sensed the crisis. The location was at the rear side of the party. She didn't feel the "existences" there, but she somehow used the barrier to not only envelop Shizuku and Nagayama, but also

everyone on the rear. It was something she did instinctively which could also be said that it was due to her experience. Her action was extremely correct. Without Suzu's barrier, the third blurred space would mercilessly cut up Nagayama and other party members.

However, Suzu was immediately blown backward as compensation of splendidly protecting her allies because she directly received the impact from the crushed barrier. Fortunately, Eri was right behind her and she successfully caught Suzu, but the crisis had not ended yet, when the third blurring space immediately began to move in pursuit just like the other two blurring spaces, wounding Shizuku and Nagayama.

Because of the suddenness, those classmates who could not react towards the three approaching blurred spaces… at that moment,

"Give the grace and divine protection of light to us! "Heavenly Time," "Heavenly Perimeter," "Heaven Interruption!"."

Kaori activated three light magic at the same time with almost no chanting; she was able to omit some of her chants.

The first magic spell was a mid-rank recovery magic, which immediately healed Shizuku and Nagayama, who were wounded, blown away, and landed on the ground. It was a magic spell capable of healing more than two people remotely away from her. Faint white lights poured on the two people who somehow managed to stand up while groaning because of the pain; their wound recovery rate was abnormal.

The second spell was used to allow Suzu and the others to be unnoticable by the three blurred spaces. Similar faint white light poured into them. The light buoyantly expanded, and an area of light appeared at where they were at.

"Heavenly Perimeter" was a mid-ranked recovery magic, and it was the so called auto-regen. Although the duration was long, the amount recovered was little at a time. It had the feature of wrapping the surrounding with light made of magic power while the magic was activated. Kaori was using that feature, and the recovered amount was set to the lowest to indirectly reveal the appearances of the unknown enemies.

What appeared inside the white light were strange demonic beasts with lion head, dragon-like limbs, sharp claws, snake as the tails, and eagle-like wings on their backs — the so called Chimera. They must have peculiar magic for camouflaging. It was a quite troublesome ability, since not only were their appearances camouflaged, their

presences as well. However, the fact that they could not exhibit their full power in that state, and thus the blurred spaces, was a blessing in the midst of misfortunes.

After all, even Shizuku and Nagayama who held the best combat prowess among the classmates were incapacitated with only a blow. They were enemies to be feared. Their powers were completely far above the demonic beasts the students had met on the previous floors, and obviously even stronger than the demonic beasts in this floor.

The three Chimeras readied their claws and fangs in pursuit as though they knew the location even inside the light. Their targets were Shizuku, Nagayama, and Suzu, these three. However, their fangs and claws could not reach the three, since three shields of light appeared before each of them and the attacks were averted in a hair's breadth, and the angle slightly moved while the shields were crushed by the Chimeras' attacks.

They were the mid-ranked defense spell, "Heaven's Interruption." It was the higher ranking version of the beginner-ranked light defensive magic, "Light's Interruption," where more than two shields produced at the same time. Even the "Barrier-user," Suzu was using this magic, and by replenishing the destroyed edges of the shield in high-speed, it was possible to stall time though it'd soon to be destroyed when weakened. In this respect, Kaori could not reached Suzu whose specialty was barrier, since she could not use it like such as even when her aptitude towards light element is high. At best, she could only do minute adjustments to the shield.

However, the shields were helpful. At the moment Suzu's strong barrier was destroyed in a blow, Kaori realized her barrier would be useless, so she chose a method to avert the attack. To begin with, she didn't expect the incoming attacks would be the same as before, so it was more like a sink or swim situation. She was lucky it went well.

The three Chimeras whose attacks were averted, became irritated and moved to attack again. The time she gained was only a moment. It was as though the Chimeras didn't find it troublesome. However, there was no change that the most expensive thing to buy was time, even if it was just a moment. Kouki and the others didn't miss that moment.

"Get away from Shizukuuuu!!"

So, is it okay to attack Nagayama?, No one said just a sentence. Perhaps because of anger, Kouki roared and used "Ground Shrinker" to immediately reached the Chimera near Shizuku. Kouki's movement speed was so fast that he left after images. He swung his Holy Sword towards the Chimera's neck, and the sword became shinier.

At the same time, Ryuutarou took on the Chimera that went to attack Nagayama with his thrusted fist in a karate stance. Rather than a direct attack, he thought it'd be faster to attack using the gauntlet-type artifact's ability, shock wave. A war cry came from Ryuutarou and magic power was supplied to the gauntlet.

Furthermore, Eri, who caught the blown away Suzu, thrusted her hand out, began to chant when she felt the same crisis as Suzu, and powerful fire magic was activated. It was a mid-ranked magic called "Sea of Flame," and just like the name, it was a ranged magic that manipulated tidal waves of flame. Even agile enemy would not be able to easily avoid it.

With sublime power and speed, Kouki swung the Holy Sword down from an upper stance. While Ryuutarou's thrusted fist drew out a form that couldn't even be more splendid and resulted in a violent shock wave that went forward just like a cannonball. Eri's deathbringer, crimson tidal wave surged to swallow its target, turning it into ashes and dusts.

However…

""ROOOAAAR!!""
"GuUURawwwr!!"

Unbeknownst to them, some things had hidden themselves. Three shadows roared and attacked Kouki's party right before their attacks would directly hit their targets.

""Hmmmph!?""

The suddenness of this situation made Kouki and Ryuutarou felt chills running down their spines. Two of the shadow rushed towards Kouki and Ryuutarou with tremendous power, and the metal maces in their hands were swung with great speed.

Kouki immediately used the sword's centrifugal force to twist his body while Ryuutarou raised his left hand towards the incoming mace instead of his thrusted out right hand. With his balance broken, Kouki rolled on the ground, and Ryuutarou was blown away by the enemy's second attack, a punch, after he defended against the mace.

What attacked Kouki and Ryuutarou were demonic beasts with appearances similar to Brutal, with a height of 2.5 meters. However, even though they were similar to monsters in RPGs such as Orc and Ogre, the Brutals were like pigs while these demonic beasts were considerably smart. Furthermore, their Brutal-like bodies were strengthened to their limits. In fact, the strength and speed from the previous surprise attack could not be compared to Brutals.

On the other side, even though Eri didn't receive any direct attack, the psychological impact she received was greater than Kouki and Ryuutarou's. Reason being, the shadow that suddenly appeared opened its mouth and begun to inhale the surging tidal waves at once. *WoOOOoosh!* The expansive flame gathered at a single point and disappeared. The shadow inhaled all of the flame in only tens of seconds.

What appeared in the space where the flame and heat disappeared was turtle-like demonic beast with six feet. The shell on its back was dyed in crimson, just like the rampaging flame that earlier changed its target to ashes.

In the next moment, the turtle with six feet finished absorbing the flame and once again opened its mouth wide. At the same time, the shell on its back shined intensely and red light appeared inside its opened mouth. It was just like how energy was collected before a laser beam was fired.

Seeing that, an impatient expression appeared on Eri's face; she had no room to spare since she had just fired her magic. However, her impatient was blown off by the usual cheerful voice of her best friend in her arms.

"Don't underestimate me! Come in succession o' light of protection and be revived as long as I have the will, "Heaven's Interruption"!"

In a moment, ten light shields appeared in succession before Suzu and Eri. All of the shields were set up diagonally at 45 degree angle. The super-high temperature beam was fired by the six-legged turtle at the same time the shields appeared, and parried upward through where the shields were crushed.

Even so, the power of the beam was greatly above the attack from the previous demonic beasts, since it only needed a moment to pulverize a shield. Suzu was gritting her teeth and chanted in succession to construct new shields one after another. It could be said it was as expected of a "Barrier-user," the shield's construction speed rivaled the speed of the shield's destruction and succeeded in parrying the six-legged turtle's beam, barely.

The parried beam hit the dungeon's ceiling accompanied with great tremor, pulverizing its surroundings, and the scattered scorching minerals fell down like a rain.

"Damn it! What's just happened!?"

"Just what are those demonic beasts!?"

"Shit, let's defeat them now!"

Only until the situation progressed this much did Hiyama's gang and Nagayama's party slipped out of their confusion and prepared to fight. The wounded Shizuku and Nagayama were also healed completely, and they began to respectively attack the Chimeras.

Shizuku entered the super-high-speed world, and not even her after image could be seen. *Voom!* Her figure disappeared with a sound of exploded air, appearing right behind the Chimera in the next moment, and she used the sword drawing technique to unsheathe her swords that had returned to their sheaths before anyone noticed.

"No Beat," it was a skill that enable movement without preliminary action. Rather than simply moving with speed without leaving any after images, one just could not catch up with her movement, which rapidly quicken and slowed. In addition, her sword drawing and slashing speed were further increased by the skills derived from Swordsmanship. The speed of the naked blades was even faster than what an ordinary living being would recognize as a swift flash.

To return the blow she received a while ago, she used one of the Yaegashi-style secret techniques, "Void Severing." It cut even the space just like its name; at one moment one could see the silver-colored trajectory of the sword, and the Chimera's snake tail was severed into two in the next moment.

"GURAaaaaWR!!"

Raising roar of anger, the Chimera turned around and swung its sharp claws. However, its attack only cut through the air; Shizuku had already moved to the other side. She swung her two swords, and cut the Chimera's flank.

"Kuh!"

Shizuku used her speed to steadily damage the Chimera. However, Shizuku's expression didn't clear up, inadvertently leaking a sound as though she had been bitten a bitter bug. It was because her calculation had been wrong. In reality, Shizuku had wanted to cut the Chimera's body apart with the first strike, but she could not do that, and the snake tail entered her slashing range instead. Even the second slash that supposed to cut the Chimera's body in even halves were stopped when it quickly bent its body right before the slashes reached it.

The Chimera could not keep up with Shizuku's speed. However, it was not like it could not respond to her. It could not see her figure, so it was barely able to respond to Shizuku's extreme speed using its reflex speed; a truly troublesome opponent. It was something more than troublesome for Shizuku who wanted to finish the fight quickly and rescue the others.

Afterwards, she swung her swords for the third and fourth times, and though there were numerous wounds on the Chimera's body, they were too shallow to become a mortal wound. In addition, the Chimera began to become accustomed to Shizuku's speed. An impatient expression appeared on Shizuku's face.

The bad things continued for Shizuku, no for all of them.

"CAAAWWWW!!"

When she heard a shriek suddenly resounding around the room, dark red light wrapped the severed tail and wings before her, and the Chimera's wounds immediately healed. Kaori's "Heavenly Perimeter"'s effect had been significantly lowered, and thus, wounds were not supposed to be healed easily no matter how shallow they were. Shizuku opened her eyes wide and looked at the source of the shriek, while she kept caution towards the healed Chimera.

Thus, unbeknownst to her, the Demon race woman who was standing idly like an unconcerned spectator had a double-headed white crow riding on her shoulder, with one head turned towards Shizuku. More accurately, it was facing the Chimera before Shizuku.

"There's even a healer!?"

She thought she finally wounded the difficult enemy, but it was immediately healed. Even at the best of times, lots of time would have passed before she could attain the victory. However, now, there was an excellent healer in stand by for the Chimera. Such a situation made Shizuku screamed instinctively.

Not only Shizuku, her comrades at the other places similarly raised bitter screams.

Kouki, who fought the Brutal-look-alike while receiving support, had almost finished after he deeply cut the Brutal-like body from shoulder to the waist, but the crow's other head was looking at the wound, and when it shrieked, it was healed as though time had rewinded.

The same thing happened to Ryuutarou and Nagayama. The second Brutal-look-alike Ryuutarou was fighting had its abdomen hollowed out as though it had exploded, and one of its arm was broken. However, it was immediately healed when the head that was looking at the Chimera Shizuku was fighting against, turned towards it and shrieked. Even the Chimera Nagayama had battled against that had parts of its body caved in was immediately healed.

"Looks like you have quite the hard time. What will you do? Will you come to our side now? If it is now, I will let you think for a while, you know?"

Seeing Kouki's party having a hard fight, the woman of the Demon race clapped her hands with composed attitude and once again spoke to invite them. To begin with, she asked the question knowing what the answer will be, and her expression remained cold. Her expectation turned to be right.

"Don't joke around! We won't yield to your threat! We won't be defeated! And I will give you the proof! Here I go, "Limit Break"!"

The words of the woman of the Demon race made Kouki raised an expression of indignation. He used the Holy Sword to counter the Brutal-look-alike's swung down mace, and used the chance to activate "Limit Break".

Cladded in divine light, Kouki shouted *this would be the end*, and charged towards the woman of the Demon race.

Chapter 2 : Versus Demon Race II

"Limit Break," a skill that temporarily triples ones basic stats using magic power, however, it is literally breaking one's limit; so, it cannot be used for a long period and the user will be weakened proportionally to the time it was use afterwards. That is because of the severe fatigue and results in the inability to use even half of one's original power. Therefore, the time and place to use this last-resort skill should be thought out carefully.

Because of the demonic beast's strength and recovery, Kouki judged that the morale of his companions would plummet if this kept up, so he used "Limit Break" to immediately defeat the White Crow and the Demon race woman.

With Kouki's declaration of "Limit Break," pure white light wrapped around his body. At the same time, the Brutal-look-alike, whose mace attack was counter attacked again, didn't notice the change in Kouki.

"O' blade-like will, bear the light and tear my enemy, "Light Sword"!"

Kouki bent his body forward to dodge the Brutal-look-alike's mace. He then immediately slashed from below using the Holy Sword which was extended by the blade of light.

He had slashed the enemy before by using "Light Sword," and although it received a severe wound, it wasn't life-threatening. However, this time he was using "Limit

Break," which tripled his stats, and with the effect of "Light Sword," the Brutal-look-alike was diagonally cut in two, as though it was made of butter.

One beat later, the Brutal-look-alike's body shifted diagonally and *boom!*, it crumbled with a raw sound. Kouki put strength into his legs and immediately accelerated fiercely towards the Demon race woman.

Nothing obstructed the space between Kouki and the Demon race woman. Although it was said that the Demon race was a superior race in terms of magic, but it was too late for her to do anything. With this, she would be slashed along with the white crow, the end. Everyone thought so.

At that moment,

"""""GUUURAAAAAARRRRRWW!!!"""""

"Wha—!?"

There were six blurred spaces, and they attacked Kouki while roaring loudly. Because the Chimeras were attacking simultaneously from all sides, Kouki instinctively raised an astonished voice and his eyes opened wide.

He immediately slammed the brake, dodging the attack from the front, and used Holy Sword to slash the Chimera attacking from his right. Next, he believed in the performance of the Holy Armor and endured the deadly attack he received on his back.

However, those were the only things he could do. The claws of the Chimera on his left hit his shoulder. He flew outside of the encirclement when the last Chimera suddenly jumped, dug its foreleg claws on Kouki's shoulders, and pinned him.

"Ack!!" A cry slipped through his grit his teeth.

He was barely able to stop the Chimera that was about to pierce its fangs in the scruff of his neck with Holy Sword. With claws digging into his shoulders, the power to block the jaws was reduced. Kouki who had already broken his limit was gradually cornered, and he could not bring forth enough power.

"O' light of grace, bring your healing and warning to this place, "Heavenly Burn"! "Binding Seal"!"

Seeing Kouki in such a pinch, Kaori promptly activated recovery magic spells. "Heavenly Burn" was a mid-ranked healing magic with a single target. Its effect was higher than the recovery magic, "Heavenly Time," she used earlier to heal several

people. However, the Chimera's claws were digging in Kouki's shoulders, so it wouldn't be healed the way things were going.

Therefore, she activated mid-ranked restraining magic of the light element, "Binding Seal," at the same time she activated the healing magic. "Binding Seal" was a magic that produced a cage of light centering on the confined object — Kaori used that magic on Kouki. The cage of light instantaneously expanded around Kouki and pushed the Chimera away.

With the claws coming out of his shoulders, "Heavenly Burn" demonstrated its effect and Kouki's wounds were instantly healed.

At the same time, some people from the rear, such as Suzu and the rear guard group who were fighting against the Chimera and the six-legged turtle, released attack magics towards the Chimeras attacking Kouki. However the distance was too far and they could not get a good aim, even when they had had the effects of Kaori's "Heavenly Perimeter," they were still unable to deal great damages to the Chimeras.

Even so, they were able to buy time for Kouki to regain his balance. Next, he readied his Holy Sword, chanted, and charged to counter attack when he was fully healed.

""Soaring Four Wing Blades""

He swung the Holy Sword which drew a curve in the air, and four slashes of light appeared from the space where he swung at. The targeted Chimeras sensed the crisis beheld by Kouki's action strengthened by "Limit Break," and immediately jumped away to evade.

However,

"Capture them, "Restrain"!"

With a chantless-like short chant, Kaori activated mid-ranked restraining magic of the light element, "Restrain." Numerous chains of light jumped out from the evading Chimeras' feet and twined around their neck and feet. Though it was not difficult to get out of it with the strength the Chimeras possessed, they were stopped for a moment and could not evade.

As a result, the four Chimeras were directly hit by Kouki's "Soaring Blade"s and died as their blood splattered around.

Kouki glared and pointed his Holy Sword towards the Demon race woman.

"How regrettable; your last resort was ineffective against us. Now there's nothing else to protect you!"

Upon hearing Kouki's words, the Demon race woman looked dubiously, no, looked at Kouki with amazement. In her mind, she thought, "Why was it necessary for him to declare that now? Wouldn't it be better for him to immediately slash me?"

Even though the Demon race woman should have been cornered, her composed attitude irritated Kouki. First she let out Chimeras, next Brutal-look-alikes, and now Chimeras again. Those surprise attacks were also the source of his irritation. "You only used surprise attacks and didn't fight fairly. Moreover, you're just spectating. What a coward!" Kouki shouted.

"… Well, that's not my last resort."

"What a bluff!"

"Anyway, forget about whether or not it's a bluff, but what will you do after you repel those? I have confirmed your power as the "Heretic Apostles," so I have no more business with you."

"What ar—"
"KYAAA!"

"— Kh!?"

The Demon race woman said while going through the trouble of flipping her hair, when a scream rang out from behind him the same time Kouki was questioning her.

Kouki reflexively looked back, and what greeted his eyes were five Brutal-look-alikes and Chimeras. Furthermore, there was a black, four-eyed wolf he had never seen before who was ridden by a 60 centimeter black cat with four tentacles. They simultaneously attacked his comrades and Kouki could see the spectacle where the black cat's tentacle pierced through the flank of one of his best friends in Nagayama's party, Nomura Kentarou. The one who screamed was Yoshino Mao, also from Nagayama's party.

"Kentarou! Damn you, don't you get carried away!"

"Mao, calm down! I will heal him!"

A member from their party, Endou Kousuke, slashed the tentacle that pierced Nomura and he glared at the black cat with eyes blazing in anger.

Nomura fell and raised an anguished voice, which made Yoshino dumbfounded, but only to be scolded by Tsuji Ayako who immediately activated healing magic. It was a blessing that she completed her chant completed before the tentacle cut by Endou healed up.

“Wh—, there are still more—!”

As he looked back, Kouki made a surprised sound because there were new reinforcements that appeared unbeknownst to him.

“The effect of Chimera’s peculiar magic, “Camouflage,” activates on whoever it touched. Or have you not thought of such a thing? Looks, there’s more of them.”

“Kh!?”

The large amount of demonic beasts that suddenly appeared had reversed the situation, and Kouki and his comrades were now the ones who were inferior in terms of numbers. Seeing that, Kouki hurriedly turned back. To Kouki, the Demon race woman gave away the secret of the Chimera’s “Camouflage” effect and further revealed more demonic beasts. Ten four-eyed wolves and black cats appeared from behind her and rushed towards Kouki.

“Kuh— oOO!”

The black cats’ tentacles extended at extraordinary speed and attacked Kouki from all directions. Kouki made a pinwheel rotation to cut the incoming tentacles using the Holy Sword, but one of the black cats had gotten close to his side and tried to hit him. It was aiming at Kouki’s face, so the jumping black cat shouldn’t have been able avoid his attack mid-air. Kouki said, “One down!,” when he was convinced of the demonic beast’s death.

However, his conviction was easily overturned in the next moment. Somehow, the black cat did a somersault in mid-air and avoided Kouki’s attack. Next, sharp claws that didn’t suit the cat’s physique targeted Kouki’s neck.

Kouki was barely able to move his head and avoided the attack, but he was unable to respond to a four-eyed wolf’s attack that came from behind him, due to the collapse of his balance. It didn’t result in a serious injury thanks to his defense of his armor and the strength from exceeding his limit. He then mightily jumped away and returned to his comrades.

With that, the obviously abnormally strong demonic beasts surrounded Kouki’s party. Everyone tried to fight back desperately, but what was even more troublesome was that the enemies had suddenly increased in numbers and were

cooperating. In addition, the white crow would immediately heal the demonic beasts if they didn't die in one hit.

Although the frontline somehow managed to avoid collapsing, thanks to the continuous healing of Kaori and the other "Healer," Tsuji Ayako, they still could not do anything to break the situation.

Kouki dealt damage to the enemies using the power he gained from "Limit Break," but it had become impossible for him to attack the demonic beasts with "hit and run" tactic while cooperating with the others.

With high-speed movement comparable to Shizuku's "No Beat," the black cat and the four-eyed wolf that possessed a skill called "Prediction," had excellent teamwork which resulted in the evasion of what should have been a mortal wound.

They desperately fought back, but shadows of despair gradually began to loom over the expression of the classmates. That feeling grew larger thanks to the participation of the Demon race woman in the battle.

"The golden eyed lizard sleeping in the depth of the ground, the magic-eyed king born in this world, the one who brought the curse of darkness within his view. What I seek is the eternal and everlasting prison of darkness. Neither terror, nor despair, nor sorrow, to lock out my enemies with those eyes, and what remains would be demise, only cold sanction sculptures. Crush everything and return them to the ground! "Final Prison"!"

Immediately after the chant was finished, a gray orb appeared from the woman of the Demon race's outstretched hand and flew towards Kouki's party drawing a parabola. Although it could not be called fast, there's no one currently in Kouki's party who could not evade it. At a glance, it was truly not a marvelous magic, but the one whose abdomen pierced by the tentacle, Nomura Kentarou, was already pale faced because of the blood loss, and became paler. He shouted,

"Kh!? Fuck! Taniguchi—!! Stop that thing! Use your barrier!"

"Eh!? R-Roger! Bring a sanctuary that won't let the God's enemy pass here! "Holy Interruption"!"

Nomura, who was at his wit's end ordered, and Suzu used shortened chants to invoke high-ranked defense magic of the light element. The shining barrier created a dome-like state and surrounded Kouki's party. Because "Holy Interruption" didn't have a function to detect friend or foe, there were lots of demonic beasts wrapped inside the dome-like barrier. Not only was it a strong magic, it also had high magic power consumption rate. It was the reason why it was often not used in meaningless

fights. However, Nomura's shout told her the danger of the magic activated by the Demon race woman, so at the very least, she wanted to use a strong barrier magic and immediately chose "Holy Interruption."

The gray-colored swirling orb immediately collided with the barrier right after Suzu expanded the "Holy Interruption." The gray orb had tremendous pressure and strength belied by its appearance to break through the barrier. To not let it break through, Suzu gritted her teeth and desperately endured the feeling of her magic power being consumed.

Then, as if they received an order from the Demon race woman, the demonic beasts' movements changed. Several all of them began to aim at Suzu simultaneously.

"Suzu!"

"Protect Taniguchi!"

Eri fired her magic to obstruct the approaching Brutal-look-alike as she called Suzu's name. With Suzu in the center, there was Eri with Saitou Yoshiki and Kondou Reiichi fighting against a Chimera, and a four-eyed wolf in opposite of her. Nomura came to Suzu's side.

However, a black cat suddenly appeared from the crack of their defense towards the unmoving Suzu who could not move while maintaining "Holy Interruption." Nomura immediately activated "Stone Spear" and skew it to the ground. However, the black cat was zigzagging mid-air, bent its body to avoid the stone spear, and thrust out all of its tentacles.

"Taniguchii!"

"Agh!?"

Nomura called Suzu's name to warn her, but it was too late. The tentacles had instantly pierced the Suzu's stomach, thigh, and right arm while she tried to dodge. Her small body was caught and was thrown to the side with a strong force.

With splattered blood, Suzu's back struck the ground and her breath hung. Then, she screamed due to the incapability to endure the severe pain the same time she regained her breath.

"AaAaAUGH!!"

"Suzu-chan!"

“Suzu!”

Hearing her agonized voice, Kaori and Eri instantly screamed Suzu’s name. Although Kaori tried to focus her mind to activate healing magic, but the shining barrier Suzu made had disappeared first.

“Everyone, get away from that orb!”

Nomura warned the others with a voice filled with frustration. However, up till now, no magic could rival Suzu’s impregnable defense, “Holy Interruption.” That was why his warning came too slow.

With the disappearance of the barrier, the swirling grey orb flew mightily, crashed into the ground and exploded soundlessly, and scattered grey smoke to the surroundings tremendously.

Saitou, Kondou, and Nomura, ran towards Suzu who had collapsed in agony nearby. The grey smoke immediately wrapped around them. There were no shadows of demonic beasts. All of them had simultaneously distanced themselves at once.

The grey smoke continued to extend and tried to engulfed Kouki and the others.

“Come, O’ wind! “Wind Bomb”!”

Kouki immediately used wind magic to create a squall, which pushed the grey smoke outside the room.

Maybe because it was created with magic, the smoke didn’t easily get blown out of the room unlike ordinary smoke, but because Kouki’s magic was strengthened thanks to the “Limit Break,” he successfully blew the smoke away after some struggle, into the dungeon passageway.

However, what was left by the smoke was…

“That can’t be, Suzu!”

“Nomura-kun”

“Saitou! Kondou!”

Saitou and Kondou had completely petrified and became unable to speak, while Suzu had her lower half of her body petrified, and Nomura who covered Suzu had the left side of his body petrified.

Saitou and Kondou were petrified with dumbfounded expressions because they didn't understand what had happened. Suzu whose lower half petrified, coupled with severe pain, had lost her consciousness with a truly pained expression.

On the other hand, the one who protected Suzu, Nomura, had the most negligible damage, but he still let out a pained groan while gritting his teeth looking like he seemed to be enduring an acute pain. Nomura's damage was slight because he was an "Earth Magic-user." Carrying the highest aptitude to earth attribute, it was natural he had high resistance against magic from Earth element.

In addition, Nomura instantaneously saw through the Demon race woman's magic because it was of the Earth element, which he had studied — high-ranked offensive magic, "Final Prison." It was a troublesome magic scattering petrifying grey smoke. Even if it was only a slight touch, the magic would gradually invade the body until one was completely petrified, and the only action to prevent it was to create barrier that'd hold up until the effect has worn off, or use strong magic to blow the smoke away. Moreover, the barrier would also be petrified unless it was a high-ranked one, and the smoke could also only be blown away using a high-ranked magic.

"Bastard! How dare you!"

Kouki raised an enraged expression because of the disaster that fell upon his comrades. Kouki, who was wrapped in a shining light due to the effect of "Limit Break," began to shine in a brighter dazzling light. He looked like he would charge towards the Demon race woman at any moment.

However, Shizuku acted as a stopper to Kouki when she yelled with an admonishing voice, followed by telling him to withdraw with all of their might.

"Stop! Kouki! Let's withdraw! The path of retreat is clear now!"

"Wh—!? After what had happened, how can I run away?!"

However, with his fury from seeing his comrades getting hurt, Kouki glared and objected to Shizuku's plan of retreating. The pressure Kouki released rushed towards Shizuku, but she received it as though it was nothing, and pressured him instead with a stern expression.

"Listen! Kaori will surely cure them. However, it'll take time. There's also the possibility of it being too late if we are too slow to treat them. So it is necessary to withdraw now and recover! Besides, we lack three people now, so if you rush out, everyone won't be able to endure the next attack! We'll truly be annihilated!"

"Ugh, but…"

“In addition, isn’t it about time your “Limit Break” reached dangerous time? In this situation, it’ll be truly the end if Kouki is weakened! Please calm down! Everyone also feels the same as you!”

Hearing the logical words of his childhood friend, Kouki hesitated as he bit his lip when he noticed the bleeding at the edge of Shizuku’s lips, and he felt his boiling head go cold. Shizuku was also mortified. Before she knew it, she had cut her lip. Her important comrades had been done in, and if possible she wanted to immediately beat up her enemy.

“Okay! Everyone, time to retreat! Shizuku, Ryuutarou! Please endure it for a little longer!”

“Leave it to me!”

“Right on!”

Kouki thrusted up the Holy Sword and began a long chant. Until now, he didn’t use any long chant because it would not have defused their earlier situation. However, it was now the perfect magic to clear a path for their retreat. But, it became necessary for him to entrust his defense to Shizuku and Ryuutarou because he was completely defenseless when he’s chanting. In other words, they must face the demonic beasts aiming for Kouki. Naturally, even if Shizuku and Ryuutarou could not cope with it, they would still desperately fight back with considerable vigor even with injuries.

“Do you think I’ll let you escape?” When she said this, the Demon race woman ordered the demonic beasts to block the passage behind Kouki’s party. Then, she began to chant magic, with the chanting Kouki as her target.

However, that’s when something abnormal began to happen to the Demon race woman.

“”””””ROOOOAR!!”””””

“Kh!? Why!”

Somehow, five of the Chimeras that should be her allies were attacking the woman. While being surprised with widely opened eyes, she immediately resumed and used a shortened chant to activate her magic. High density of dust clouds became swirling blades with the woman in the center, cutting two of the attacking Chimeras. The attacks from the remaining Chimeras were somehow avoided by blowing herself away using the dust clouds.

The Demon race woman yelled, “Why am I being attacked!?” She was agitated while staring at the Chimeras that attacked her. Then, she noticed something — all of the Chimeras had parts of their bodies destroyed. There’s one that was headless, and one with a deep scar in its body which still had blood dripping from it even now.

“These…”

Just as the Demon race woman noticed, the five Chimeras that attacked her were the ones defeated by Kouki. The should-be-dead Chimeras stood up and attacked her. The situation was unreal until the Demon race woman recalled a certain magic and muttered, “Don’t tell me…”

“I won’t let you disturb Kouki-kun!”

As she shouted so, Eri swung her hand like a baton and made the corpses of the Chimeras surround the Demon race woman.

“Tch! Necromancer, huh! I didn’t get such information!”

The Demon race woman had prior investigations before she waited in ambush for Kouki’s party. From the information, there’s no mention of someone capable using super difficult magic such as Necromancy, so this situation was completely unexpected. That was because, even though Eri had “Necromancer” as her class, she was bad at it and never use Necromancy in actual combat, but now this fact worked in their favor.

Even if I am bad at it, I’ll just overcome it! Eri thought while she glared at the Demon race woman with a powerful gaze, and skillfully manipulated the Chimeras as though it wasn’t her first time doing it in actual combat. However, she was just going to buy time rather than defeating the Demon race woman.

In the meantime, Kaori used “Focus” and “Ten Thousand Heavens” on Suzu. Among the party members, Suzu was the one in the direst situation, which was why she decided on focusing healing Suzu first. “Ten Thousand Heavens” was a mid-ranked healing magic of the light element capable of curing abnormal statuses. However, the petrification magic was a considerably strong magic, and she couldn’t cured it all. Though the holes in her abdomen and arm were immediately recovered, she had lost a considerable amount of blood. She was in such a critical situation where needed immediate rest. It was also necessary to heal the hole in her leg the moment her petrification is undone.

Nomura, with a petrified left side of his body, had been diligently worked on to be released from his abnormal state by Tsuji Ayako. Tsuji Ayako had a high aptitude

for healing magic, but the fact that Nomura had high resistance against earth magic, made his recovery rate considerably faster. His petrified leg had already been cured.

However, even with that, Tsuji Ayako could only grit her teeth when she sneaked a peek at Kaori swinging her white wand. Although their class was the same, "Healer," Kaori was obviously above her in terms of capability. Kaori was using magic to simultaneously heal Suzu who had far more serious injuries than Nomura. In addition, she sometimes used healing magic on Shizuku and Ryuutarou who were in battle to defend Kouki. It was a feat impossible to be mimicked by Ayako. She was mortified and felt miserable because she couldn't heal all of her allies while being in a dire situation.

Although Nomura seemed to want to say something to Ayako in regards to what she was feeling, he thought it was not the right time, so he bore the pain and muttered an incantation.

With their fighting force deceased and Kouki out of the fight, Hiyama and Nakano were covered in wounds as they confronted many demonic beasts. On the other side, Nagayama's party and Eri, who were protecting the two healers, noticed they had almost reached their limits. With the current flow, it would only be several minutes before they completely exhaust themselves.

Light gathered in Kouki's Holy Sword, but Nakano, who was about to cry at any moment, panicked when she thought of this as a suicidal action. The party members anxiously waited for the time… which finally came.

"Here I go! "Heavenly Downpour"!"

One flashing line fired from the thrusted up Holy Sword. The light exploded and scattered before the ceiling, pouring down towards the surrounding demonic beasts like meteors.

This "Heavenly Downpour" was an attack magic from light element where it flew above enemies, could pinpoint several enemies, and attacked them simultaneously. Its power wasn't that high since its power was distributed among the scattered lights, and was originally used to clean up a lot of small fries. But in "Limit Break" state, this bombing-like magic was enough to clean up demonic beasts in 50th floor.

However, the abnormally strong demonic beasts brought by the demon race woman didn't receive that much damage as expected, and at most, it only blew them away from his comrades as far as possible. But it was enough for Kouki. By creating a gap, his comrades would be able to retreat while the demon race woman was still occupied by the Chimera controlled by Eri.

Having confirmed so, Kouki demonstrated the characteristic of the magic which had a stupidly long chanting.

""Converge"!"

As it pour down from the heaven, the rain of light that made the demonic beasts retreat temporarily, once again converged into the Holy Sword. The spectacle where the meteors converged as they left trails was quite a fantastic scene. Kouki thrusted the Holy Sword straight, and it shone as it cladded in light towards the demonic beasts that positioned themselves before the passage the retreat path of him and his comrades. With a war cry, he pulled the last trigger from the a series of magic.

""Heavenly Claws Downpour"!"

Immediately, numerous meteors shot like a bombardment when his thrusted the Holy Sword forward. Even though it looked the same as previous attack, it had far stronger power since Kouki used his trump card, "Heaven Might," and naturally it swept away the demonic beasts that closed their retreat path.

Normally, even if he wanted to use "Heaven Might," the chant was long and he didn't want Shizuku and Ryuutarou to protect him any longer than needed.

Even so, "Heavenly Claws Downpour" was the best technique he had in the current situation. The meteor-like torrent of lights went straight towards the demonic beasts blocking their retreat path, and caused numerous explosions simultaneously at the moment of impact. The bombardment that consisted of numerous light bullets exploded like the cluster bomb. The consecutive impacts resulted in the broken balance of the demonic beasts as they were being blown away.

"""ROOOOAR!!"""

The demonic beasts screamed as they closed their eyes. "Heavenly Claws Downpour" had an additional effect, blindness, caused by looking at the flash. The strong light generated in close proximity burnt their sights. Rubbing their eyes with their backhands, the demonic beasts blindly rampaged.

These demonic beasts were already out of Kouki's party's path of retreat. A way had opened straight to the passage.

"Now! Let's retreat!"

With Kouki's order, everyone simultaneously moved. Nagayama had carried the petrified Kondou and Saitou on his shoulders while Endou shouldered the fainted

Suzu. Even though his left arm was still petrified, Nomura stood up by himself, endured the acute pain, and began to run towards the passage.

“Tch! Don’t let them escape! Capture them!”

While fighting the last two Chimeras, the demon race woman ordered the unharmed demonic beasts. The demonic beasts moved as instructed and began their pursuit at once. Chimeras, four-eyed wolves, and black cats, they were all swift-footed demonic beasts, and the distance between them and Kouki’s party was shortened in less than no time.

It was at that time Nomura turned around. With pained face, he thrusted out his right hand and revealed a fearless smile.

“Don’t ever think I’ll be defeated in earth magic! It’s my payback! “Final Prison”!”

The same swirling grey orb just like the demon race woman’s magic shot out from Nomura’s hand. The magic orb transmitting petrification smoke collided with the incoming demonic beasts. When the demon race woman activated “Final Prison” a while ago, even without her saying anything, the demonic beasts immediately distanced themselves. That’s why Nomura the demonic beasts could sense the danger that lies within the spell, and chanted it in preparation to use on the pursuer as he was retreating.

What Nomura concluded turned out to be true. The moment the grey orb shot out, the charging demonic beasts immediately slammed on their brakes and began to jumped back to distance themselves and return to their previous location. At the same time, the smoke became a smokescreen concealing the appearances of Kouki and his comrade as they were retreating.

In addition, Endou used magic to erase the remains of magic power and traces of their smells. Endou’s class was an “Assassin,” so he had natural talent in covert magic, and the demonic beasts were likely unable to pursue them.

The entrance of the previous room already looked smaller behind them, and maybe it was just their imagination, but mortified howls of demonic beasts seemed like it was resounding.

Kouki’s party felt mortified because of their ragged bodies and their comrades who could not open their eyes. However, they also feel glad they survived, and continued to run away without saying anything.

Chapter 3 : Even a Mob-character Has Things It Can Do

Their current location was the deepest room in the 89th floor.

Currently, there were four entrances within the huge octagonal room, but there was actually one more passage that leads to a hidden room between two entrances. The size of the entrance to this closed room was about 10 tatami, and its entrance was splendidly camouflaged.

Inside the room was Kouki's party, who were resting in complete relief. However, their expressions were uniformly gloomy. There were only those who cast their gaze down in deep frustration. Everyone was covered in wounds, so a lot of them had expressions distorted by pain.

Normally, Kouki would use his charisma to encourage everyone, but now, his whole body was attacked by severe exhaustion due to the recoil from "Limit Break," and he leaned his body in towards the wall, shutting his mouth in silent.

In addition, at such a time, the class moodmaker who could not read the mood in a good way had a pale face due to the loss blood, and was sleeping with rough breathing as she frowned in pain. This fact was also one of the reasons which made everyone depressed.

Suzu's lower half was still petrified from the knees down, and so Kaori was still continuing the treatment. Her pierced thigh had already been healed. What was left was to undo her petrification. However, Suzu had lost a large amount of blood from the attacks of the tentacles. There was the possibility that her vital blood vessels were damaged. But it could also be said that Kaori made it in time for the healing because she was Kaori.

To begin with, even Kaori was incapable of replenishing Suzu's lost blood. Thus, she was limited to making Suzu drink the blood-increasing medicine from this world. It was the reason why Suzu's physical condition would not return to normal immediately. It was necessary for her to rest.

Kaori had spent all of her time on Suzu, so the others didn't receive her healing. Naturally, Saitou and Kondou who were petrified into object-like things were kept as they were. After Suzu's treatment ended, next were the petrified two, and the other party members who understood there were still a long wait before it was their turn, didn't complain, except for a small portion of them. It was simply because they did not have energy to do it.

Inside the dim room where the gloomy atmosphere drifted about, Shizuku wrinkled her forehead and was puzzled on how to encourage the others. Naturally, the taciturn Shizuku could not skillfully change the atmosphere, unlike Suzu. However, there was no one else to do so since Kouki was also weakened due to the effect of "Limit Break" and his defeat, so she thought she must somehow do something. She was thinking in such manner because she naturally cared about others. A true worldly-wise person.

Shizuku herself was nearing her limit both physically and mentally, and she was gradually troubled by thinking of what to do. Thus, she decided to make an unable-to-read-the-mood-style gag with the resolution of dying a honorable death. However, when she considered again, she felt as though she felt herself breaking. Then, Nomura and Tsuji Ayako appeared from the improvised passage and they conversed.

"Fuu, I think it somehow turned into a good camouflation. But as expected, I am exhausted after using such a delicate magic… I'm already at my limit."

"It's not in your field of expertise to be able to transform it into wall without any sense of incompatibility… But you even used only one magic array to do that, so it can't be helped. Cheers for your hard work."

"You also worked hard to completely undo my petrification, right? Thanks."

From the conversation of these two people, the one who made this room and camouflaged the entrance into the surrounding wall was the "Earth Magic-user," Nomura Kentarou.

"Earth Magic-user" held high aptitude towards Earth-Element magic which directly manipulates the ground, but it could not do delicate work such as manufacturing and forming such as "Transmutation." For example, it could create a bulge in the ground, make rocks fly up from the ground, harden the ground to create a stone spear, or controlling clouds of sand. In addition, for someone high-ranked, they could use petrification spells and create Golems (completely non-independent doll). However, an Earth Magic user could not produce things by separating or mixing various minerals.

That's why, though it was possible to roughly create a hole on the wall using magic array at hand, to be able to "form" a wall similar to the surrounding walls, Nomura could do nothing but constructed it using only one magic array.

It should be noted that Tsuji Ayako had treated Nomura after he had undid his petrification.

"Thanks for your hard work, Nomura-kun. We should be able to gain some time with this."

"… I hope so. Well, with this I can do nothing but pray we won't be found until everyone has recovered. About Kousuke… we can only pray, too, huh."

"… Kousuke should be okay. He won't lose to anyone in term of the thinness of his shadow."

"No, Juugo. Don't say that, I feel bad just by hearing it…"

The talk about the increasing safety of their hiding place made the depressed atmosphere slightly relaxed, and Shizuku smiled as she treated Nomura kindly due to the cancellation of creating a black history of her.

On the other hand, Nomura had a bitter smile as he prayed and looked into the distance towards one of his bestfriends who was not here now.

That's right, currently one of their companions was not here. He was Endou Kousuke. With "Assassin" as his class, he was Nagayama Juugo and Nomura Kentarou's best friend. He was neither gloomy nor a poor talker, but his existence was a forgettable one. He was a normal high school boy who could speak casually with anyone, but somehow "his shadow is thin." His figure would be gone before anyone noticed it while saying, "Huh? Where is he?," as they looked at the surrounding only to be surprised that he was right beside them. He demonstrated elusiveness without any intention of doing it at all. And, of course, it was also the same story when they were still in Japan.

Though the person himself was extremely unwilling, his ability was currently the most useful. Endou alone separated from the party and went to explain the situation to Meld and the Knights. Normally, no matter how much of a cheat the summoned person was, it was suicidal to run through the level 80ish floors alone. Even Kouki's party had little room to spare in conquering the floors, only because there were 15 people cooperating.

But, if it was Endou, a man who could puff up his chest while saying, "The world's thinnest shadow!," he could take full advantages of his stealth skills and possibly be capable of reaching the 70th floor where Meld and the Knights were without being found by any demonic beast. Thinking so, Kouki's party sent Endou off.

When he left, Endou was slightly teary eyed… surely, he felt something by leaving alone to retreat from his companions. It could not be from his companions' persuasion words, such as: "If it's you with your thin shadow, even keen demonic

beasts won't notice you! Only you have a thin shadow that won't lose to anyone, so you must be able to break through the demonic beasts without being noticed."

Truthfully, Kouki's party wanted to immediately withdraw from the upper floors. However, to their regrets, they didn't have any reserve strength left to do so. Within the party members who were covered in wounds, three of them were in no condition for battle while Kouki was in a weakened state, so they didn't think they would be able to break through the 80's floors.

Of course, they also didn't think Meld and the Knights would come to rescue them. Including Meld, only six people were capable of building their base on the 70th floor. In the party's minds, even by gaining help from other Knight members and the guild's high-ranked adventurers, whose strength came close to Meld, it should be within the safety margin for Meld and the others to reached the latter half of 70's floors, more than that was asking for the impossible.

Even with that, it would not have any meaning if Kouki's party didn't break through the 80ish floors by themselves. In other words, rather than to call for rescue, the purpose for Endo to go alone was to inform them about their situation and the Demon Race woman who lead the demonic beasts.

Kouki's party had certainly heard from Ishtal and the others from the Church of the Saints that the Demon Race was amassing demonic beasts, not by brainwashing, but enslavement, since the beasts still carried their own wills. But, they never heard of such strong demonic beasts. And the astounding thing about the demonic beasts should be the "number" not their individual strength.

In fact, the demonic beasts the Demon Race woman lead had easily cleared the human untrodden 90th floor of «Orcus Great Dungeon» and overwhelmed Kouki's party even with the cheats they carried. Such things made it strange if the human race was not destroyed sooner.

In other words, Ishtal's information was not mistaken and the conclusion was still that the demonic beasts the Demon Race controlled "had became stronger." Not only their "number" but also their individual strength was astounding. Kouki's party judged this information should be conveyed by all means.

"Shirasaki-san. Please take care of Kondou-kun and Saito-kun's de-petrification. It'll take too much time if it is me. But, leave the healing of the others to me."

"Un, okay. Don't push yourself too hard, Tsuji-san."

"I will be okay. Rather, that's my line… sorry. If only I was stronger, Shirasaki-san's responsibility would be decreased…"

On the side of the conversing with Nomura and the others, Ayako was drinking the potion for recovering magic power and she said to Kaori who was still continuing Suzu's treatment. Though both were "healers," Ayako's abilities was far inferior compared to Kaori's, and even though she didn't show it, Ayako felt herself pathetic and full of apologies, since she could only add more responsibility to Kaori.

"There is no such thing," Kaori replied so with a wry smile, then Ayako turned to heal their companions. Even if it's slight, darkness disappeared from their companions' faces when they recovered by Ayako's healing. Nomura was watching Ayako with a face as though he wanted to say something, but he could not raise a voice since he felt he'd only disturbing her work.

"… In such a situation. Just speak if there's something you want to say."

"… Shut up."

Nagayama said to Nomura with an expression as if he finds something amusing, but Nomura turned his face away as if sulking.

After that, several tens of hours passed. Kouki's party's bodies and minds were gradually recovered and they took turns to sleep.

* * *

On the other side, one person, Endou Kousuke was retreating with the entrusted information about the Demon Race. He walked steadily aiming for 70th floor, where Meld and the Knights were, without entering even one battle.

In the 80th floors, if he was noticed by the demonic beasts, one on one would work out somehow but multiple on one was an out for him. That's why, while hurrying up as much as possible, he advanced with prudent thoughts. Thanks to that, he was able to pass right before demonic beasts unnoticed, even now.

After the demonic beasts were out his sight, Endou got off of the ceiling where he stuck himself. The figure which was completely clad in black to make the best use of "Invisibility," made him look just like an "Assassin." Surely, even the demonic beasts he had just passed by earlier would receive huge damage if they were to receive a surprise attack from the ceiling. In his mind, he didn't think, "… At least feel a little of my presence…" There was no glittering at the edge of his eyes when he saw the demonic beasts pass through without noticing him at all. Absolutely not.

"I must hurry…"

Endo understood the mission imposed on him. He had guessed Kouki and the others had sent him off to transmit the information which also meant he must survive. Nagayama and Nomura said, “Do not return here,” but their wish was transmitted without the need for words.

However, after he fulfilled his duty, Endou was going to return to where Kouki and the others were. No matter what was said, he would not feel good if he was the only one who retreated to safety.

He felt somewhat empty because the demonic beasts didn’t notice him, but it was the best weapon for the current Endou as he traced the returning route memorized in his head, and finally he reached 70th floor.

While suppressing his impatience, he went towards the room with the teleport circle where Meld and the others set their base. After a while, Endo’s Sign Perception perceived the presence of six people. There’s no mistake they were Meld and the Knights. With this distance, the others should’ve noticed him since he had deactivated “Invisibility.”

Endo turned at the last corner and arrived at teleportation room where Meld and the Knights were. However, even though his figure could completely be seen, Meld and the Knights didn’t notice him at all. Endo then approached Meld with eyes of a dead fish, and called him.

“Commander! It’s me! Please notice me! It’s an emergency!”

“Uoh!? What!? Is it enemy’s attack!?”

At the moment Endou raised his voice, Meld yelled, drew his sword, jumped back, and looked at the surrounding with vigilance. Even the other Knights were surprised and shaken for a moment, then they entered battle stance.

“Like I said, it’s ME! Seriously, please don’t give such reactions!”

“Eh? Wait, it’s Kousuke, huh. Don’t surprise me like that. Rather, what happened to the others? Besides, aren’t you somewhat ragged?”

“I said it before, there’s an emergency!”

When Meld and the Knights understood it was Endou, they relaxed their shoulders because they knew how thin Endou’s shadow was. However, Endou returned earlier than scheduled, and it was only him. Furthermore, Endou was ragged and covered in wounds, that’s why their expressions became stern and guessed something must’ve happened.

As he was hurting because of the fact even the Kingdom's elite Knights were incapable of noticing him unless he called out to them. However, Endou thought it was not the time for that and he began to talk about the situation rapidly.

At first, Meld and the Knights put on dubious expressions, but their expression tightened as Endo advanced in his story. Then, maybe because his heart was shaken when his story reached to where he retreated alone, Endou was drown in tears and his head was patted.

"Don't cry, Kousuke. You are doing something only you can do. Do you think any of them can run through 20 floors in such a short time without even a fight? You've done well. I've certainly received your words."

"Commander… I, I'll return to them now. Even though they'd be able to return here by themselves… even if this time they said they won't lose… Amanogawa was unable to defeat the enemies even with "Limit Break." All we could do was to run away. Everyone is considerably exhausted, so even if their injuries heal… if they are attacked… we still don't understand everything about those bastard demonic beasts… that's why, please return to the surface and convey this information."

So ashamed that he was crying, Endou rubbed his eyes with his sleeve, and said with a resolute expression.

Meld bit his lip in regret, and handed over the tool bag filled with all of the highest grade healing potions and everything else inside. The other Knights copied Meld's actions, and entrusted their tool bags to Endo, feeling mortified.

"I can only apologize, Kousuke. Although we want to rescue them together… we will just be a hindrance to you…"

"Ah, no, please don't worry about that. There's a considerable decrease in the number of our potions, so it will surely help us."

Saying that, Endou shook the tool bags where various potions were kept with a wry smile, but Meld's frown only deepened. It was not only because he was mortified with his incapability of helping them, but also due to the bitterness.

"… Kousuke. Now, I will say the worst thing I can say. I don't care if you scorn me because it's natural. However, I want you to hear it."

"Eh? What's with this all of a sudden…"

"… No matter what happens, please take only "Kouki" back."

"Eh?"

Meld's words made Endou dumbfounded.

"Kousuke. If the demonic beasts are so strong and capable of putting the current you into such a predicament… the Human Race won't have any future if we lose Kouki. Of course, I believe all of you can go through this and meet again with us, and I wish for that… However, I must say this as the Commander of Herrlicht Kingdom's Knights. If by some chance it comes to that, please let "Kouki" live."

"…"

Endou finally guessed what Meld meant and was dumbfounded. It was to sacrifice anyone to keep the more important one alive, a "choice" that must be done for someone with duty. It was something Endou never thought of. Therefore, Endou's expression had become awfully bitter.

"… We, are we just extras added to Amanogawa?"

"Of course not. For it is true I wish and desire for everyone's survival. No, such words don't have any persuasiveness after I said that… Kousuke, at the very least I want you to convey those words to Shizuku and Ryuutarou."

"…"

Meld's words made Endou's feelings darken. Meld, Endou, and the others had spent much time together. He was always by their sides ever since their beginner days in this world, and they had fought together for a long time. Meld was a big brother-like existence for the students who went to the front lines, and someone they trusted more than anyone in this world. That's why, Endou felt betrayed by Meld who said to cast them away.

Still, he understood the necessity of what Meld said in the corner of his mind, so he could not curse him. With a dark expression, Endo only nodded and turned on his heels.

However, at that moment…

"Kousuke!?"
"Eh!?"

Meld suddenly pushed Kousuke aside and *cliiiiing!!*, the sound of metal grinding against metal rang out, it came from the drawn sword swung in an arc. Following that, he rotated once and sent a splendid kick towards the blurred space.

BooOOOm!

With such a sound, the blurred space was blown backward. Next, numerous claw marks appeared on the ground five meter from where they were. The claws were probably used to deaccelerate.

Seeing that, Endou, who fell on his butt, turned pale and muttered.

"I-Impossible. For them to catch up now…"

As though using those words as a signal, demonic beasts that had tracked Endo and the Knights, appeared one by one. Endou remained sitting on the ground, shaken to be caught this fast. Until he arrived here, he had used "Assassin" skills to erase his presence, smell, and magic trace while moving. The Demon Race woman was moving while searching for Kouki and the others, so it shouldn't be possible to catch up with Endou who ran straight to the 70th floor.

Endou's doubt was erased by the nightmare-like woman who appeared next.

"Tch. Only one, huh… I thought they had escape here where the teleport circle was… Looking at this, looks like they are hiding somewhere."

Twirling her hair in irritation, the Demon Race woman who appeared riding on a four-eyed wolf's back, made Meld and the Knights enter battle mode. From her words, the woman thought Kouki's party would run towards the teleportation circle, and that's why she came straight to this floor. With her guess off, she seemed to be irritated because she now needed to search around to look for Kouki and the others.

At the same time, it could be said Kouki and the others were still safe. Endou, Meld, and the Knights looked relieved, and smiled faintly. The demon race woman noticed them and snorted towards Endou and the Knights.

"Whatever, I also have a duty here… Let's quickly kill them and begin our search."

Immediately, all of the demonic beasts came attacking. The Chimeras charged and made the space blur, while the black cats covered the distance like a gale. The Brutal-look-alikes were approaching with maces in their hands, and the four-eyed wolves were looking for a chance from behind.

"Make a circle! Defend the teleport circle to the end! Kousuke! How long are you going to show that disgraceful attitude! Stand up and… run away! To the surface!"

"Eh!?"

As expected of the Kingdom's elites of the elites. Meld and the Knights promptly made such a formation and cooperated against the incoming demonic beasts. From hearing Endou's story about the demonic beasts a little while ago, they clearly knew they were obviously inferior in terms of offense, that's why they chose to only defend and parry.

Endou slipped a surprised voice when Meld said, "Escape to the surface." *If it's escaping, it would be better if all of us go together.* When Meld said for him to get away from this place, Endou felt that rather than going to the surface, he had a responsibility to return to where Kouki and the others were.

"Stop daydreaming! Tell the surface about the Demon Race!

"B-But, Commander Meld and the Knights…"

"We are… going to made this place our graves! Kousuke! Destroy the teleport circle once you get to the other side! It'll at least buy you some time!"

"Th-That's…"

Meld's intention was clear. Even if they went to the surface, the demonic beasts would immediately teleport, too, if no one bought them even a little bit of time. If that happened, they'd lose the method to lose the pursuers, and they were likely to be killed when the pursuers catches up. Therefore, the best choice was for only one to escape while the rest buys him some time. If the time could be bought, the other teleportation circle on 30th floor could be destroyed, and he'd lose the pursuers. The teleportation circle was the type carved on the ground, so it could be restored using "transmutation." After one had escaped and told the stationed force on the surface about this, they only have to restore the circle, and it could be used again by Kouki and the others.

The one chosen to escape was Endou, but because Meld previously said to cast away anyone other than Kouki, Endou was puzzled because this time he was told to escape at the expense of the Knights. It was the reason why he could not move immediately.

Toward such an Endou, Meld roared his deepest wish as the intense battle unfolded.

"I am sorry for being powerless! I am sorry I could not help you! I am sorry you weren't the chosen one! Kousuke! This is the last wish of the worthless me! So please hear it!"

Toward the puzzled Endou, the big bro-like man's last wish was conveyed.

"Don't die!"

Those words made Endou understand everything. Meld, in reality, never wanted to let anyone die. If someone must be sacrificed to let the others survive, it would rather be the Knights. Meld and the Knights wished for not only Kouki, but all of the students to survive. For him to be "chosen" made Endou full of bitterness.

Endou bit his lip and used all of his might to turn on his heel towards the teleport circle. It was because he felt he would not be a man if he didn't answer the wish and resolution of Meld here.

"Don't think you can!"

The Demon Race woman raised her hand towards a black cat while activating her own magic. The black cat shot out the tentacles on its back with a great velocity. In addition, stone spears also flew in the air riding on her killing intent.

Endou somehow managed to cut the tentacles with his shortsword, and bent his body to the side. It looked like he wouldn't be able to evade the following stone spears. The reason for the his incapability of evading was because of the positioning of the tentacles, and the wonderful timing of the spears that came in succession. Endou gritted his teeth and prepared to receive the impact. Even if he was to receive the attack, he was determined to keep running and jump into the teleport circle.

However, the expected impact didn't come. One of the Knight had jumped out of the formation and used his body to shield Endou.

"A-Alan-san!"

"Guh… don't worry, and go!"

With the stone spear piercing his abdomen, the Knight named Alan swung his sword to parry the attack of the incoming demonic beasts, and said to Endou with a truly manly smile. Endou strongly bit his lip as though he was biting it off, and ran towards the teleport circle.

"Tch! What persistent small fries! Aim for that boy!" The Demon Race woman sent out new order in a little haste… but it was too late.

"Hah, this is our victory! Don't you look down on Herrlicht Kingdom's Knights!"

Meld revealed a fearless smile as he shouted. At the same time, Endou activated the teleportation circle and disappeared. The Demon Race woman ignored Meld's words and thrust her hand towards the demonic beast. The demonic beast could

directly manipulate magic power, so the teleportation circle could be activated without the need for troublesome chanting. Thus, she thought she could still make it in time, if she was quick enough.

However,

"I told you not to look down on us!"

Meld and the Knights had skillful techniques and teamwork Kouki's party didn't have. Using their experiences, they obstructed the incoming demonic beasts' movements. They were outnumbered, but their defense skill and ability were praiseworthy.

To begin with, it was abnormal for Meld and the Knights to confront these many powerful demonic beasts, no matter how much of a desperate effort they put forth. Alan, whose abdomen pierced by stone spear, was finally exhausted and the balance was destroyed when he fell on his knees, and could not persist against the demonic beasts anymore. With that opening, one of the Chimeras breached their defense line and reached the teleport circle.

The Chimera disappeared the same time the glow of the magic circle was lost.

"Kuh, one, passed, huh… Kousuke… don't die."

Meld's mutters was erased by the demonic beasts' roars. Unable to stomach that she let Endou escape, the Demon Race woman sent the demonic beasts simultaneously towards Meld and the Knights.

"Fuh, we have decided our grave would be here, so let's rampage to the end. Guys, show them the spirit of Herrlicht Kingdom's Knights."

"""""Ou!"""""

With Meld's instruction, his subordinate Knights answered with a high-spirited shout. The spirit put into their shouts, even though it was just for a moment, made the surrounding demonic beasts flinch.

… Ten minutes passed

Silence once again returned to the room with teleportation circle on the 70th floor.

* * *

"Uwaaaaa—!!"

With a shout mixed in between scream and war cry, Endou jumped out from the teleportation circle in «Orcus Great Dungeon»'s 30th floor, immediately wielded his shortsword, and tried to destroy the magic circle before him.

"Wh-What!? Eh, you! What are you doing!?"

"Stop him."

"Catch him."

A black-clothed boy appeared from the teleportation circle, suddenly raised a shout and began to destroy the magic circle with the sword in his hand. This made the surrounding people, dressed as Knights, stand in blank surprise for a moment then they raised angry roars and jumped at Endou to obstruct his destructive action.

These guys were Meld's subordinates who was responsible of protecting the teleportation circle on the 30th floor. Because of the force deficiency, there were people who were at their limit just by guarding the 30th floor. Unable to destroy the magic circle with a blow, Endou struck for the second time, for the third time, and when he only need one more swing to destroy the circle, he was barely stopped from destroying the magic circle.

"L-Let go! If it's not destroyed, quickly! Those bastards will-! Let go!"

"Wh-, aren't you from the Hero's party!? Why are you…"

After seeing him closely, the Knights knew the person acting like a madman was one of the hero's companions, and the Knights spontaneously loosened their holds as they whispered voices of surprise. With that chance, Endou once again swung his shortsword and destroyed a part of the magic circle, but he was one step too slow.

The magic circle once again glowed and activated. Thus, in the next moment, a blurred space attacked Endou and the Knights.

"Damn it!"

"What's—! Guuaaa!!"

Endou immediately jumped back and was barely able to evade the Chimera's attack. However, the Knights who didn't know the situation and should have been able to evade, defenselessly received the Chimera's claw attack, and died with deeply torn armor.

One of their comrades who suddenly sprayed blood, made the other Knights panic. Endou frantically shouted towards the Knights with a voice filled with impatience.

"It's an enemy! Be careful of the blurring space! More will come if we don't destroy the magic circle!"

Endou's scream-like voice made the Knights regain their senses. However, at the same time, one more person was slashed and blown away. There were seven people guarding the teleportation circle on the 30th floor. And now two had been killed.

Endou grit his teeth towards the fact and used an "Assassin" skill called "Wallrun," to run on the ceiling and aimed to destroy the magic circle from above. However, the Chimera noticed him and tried to intercept him by jumping.

Although they still didn't understand what had happened, the Knights guessed it was necessary and jumped towards the Chimera that was trying to attack Endou. However, the Knights could only see the Chimera as a blurred space, so naturally they didn't understand what kind of attack it had; they understood nothing about it. That's why, the Knight who jumped behind the Chimera had his neck bitten by the tail-snake, while the Knights right beside its flank was beaten by its wings and thrown to the ground.

Nevertheless, it was not meaningless. The Chimera somewhat lost its balance and Endou was able to evade its dangerous claws and fangs. It was not a complete evasion since his shoulder and flank were gouged, but the snake tail was slashed, and the Chimera fell into the ground when they passed each other.

The Chimera flapped its wings to regain its balance to land on the ground slightly away from them, while Endou immediately stood up after he fell on his shoulder and simultaneously swung his short sword in his hand towards the previously damaged teleportation circle.

At the same time it landed, the Chimera turned around and once again rushed to kill Endou. However, at that time, Endou's shortsword was already pierced the magic circle with all of his might. *BAM!*, a clear sound effect rang out. It was the evidence the magic circle had been destroyed. The trace of magic when the teleportation magic circle was used had disappeared.

"With this—… kh… gaa, AaAAAAAH!!!"

Succeeded in destroying the teleportation circle, Endou inadvertently leaked a relieved sigh because no more pursuers would come. However, the Chimera's fangs bored into his right arm in the next moment, and he screamed due to the sharp pain. The strong jaws tried to bite off Endou's right arm.

The Knights charged towards it and used all of their might to attack the Chimera in order to disturb it. The Chimera whose side were pierced by strengthened short spears, inadvertently loosened the force on its jaws. Endou pulled out his right arm, slipped out the concealed knife from his left sleeve, and slashed the Chimera's eye.

The rampaging Chimera slashed two more Knights to death when they approached it to give it the finishing blows. Endou threw the knife in his hand, but the Chimera, with a slashed eye, evaded by instinct.

Immediately, one of the Knights suddenly raised a scream. He inadvertently looked towards the source and saw the Knight who previously had his neck bitten by the snake, was beaten to the ground. The Knight's lips turned purple, writhed in pain, and died in no time.

"Damn it!"

Seeing that, the last Knight ran out to kill the snake, but it was a fatal mistake. The Chimera whose back was turned to the Knight noticed the incoming enemy and immediately attacked. Covered in wounds, Endou squeezed out all of his remaining strength, and activated his certain kill attack towards the neck of Chimera that attacked the Knight.

"DieeEEEEE!!"

Being separated from his companions, forced to desert Meld and the Knights, for the Knights he knew to be killed, and various grudges mixed into his shout, he struck a fatal blow demonstrating all of his power. He tore the Chimera's neck from the nape, and it died in a moment.

Due to the inertia, Endou who sprang from the Chimera's flank, crossed it, and rolled tremendously once he reached the ground. Enduring the pain in his shoulder, right arm, and flank, Endou lifted his upper body with his left arm to confirm, and burn the Chimera's death into his eyes.

The Chimera laid quietly looking to be completely dead due to the partly torn up neck. However, Endou's expression was weak as though he was going to cry rather than feeling joy, and he couldn't help but whisper, "Damn it!"

Before his gaze was the figure of the last Knight who rushed out. He was falling prone. With sword gripped in his right hand, his face had turned purple. Beside him, was the torn up snake. Perhaps, right before the Chimera attacked, he slashed the snake that sprung to him and his face might be bathed by the toxin inside its body. Resultantly, all of the Knights who were guarding 30th floor had been annihilated.

Because he could not save even one person, Endou cried as he shouted, “Damn it!,” many times. He shouted the same words for a while, and Endou, who thought he had died due to blood loss, took out the highest grade ointments and recovery potions from the tool bags he got from Meld and the Knights. After his wounds were treated by the emergency set, he silently lined the Knights’ corpses in a corner of the room where the teleportation circle was.

For a little while, Endou watched the Knights’ figures, and slowly turned around to advanced a step toward the surface. His face was as pale as a ghost, and his eyes were hollow without any ambition. Thinking “Once again only I survived,” Endou’s heart was tightened by a heavy, cold chain. The current him moved his body just like a machine that only had to fulfill the role he was entrusted with, and he single-mindedly aimed towards the surface.

Chapter 4 : The Nostalgic Holad

“Hyahha—! Yeah!” As if such a sound could be heard, a dense, enormous, and fierce pressure mercilessly attacked the Adventurers aiming at Hajime’s party. The bloodlust that was previously coming from the Adventurers seemed nothing but a childish tantrum compared to this. As if also carrying physical force, the immature Adventurers immediately lost their consciousness while all of the standing Adventurers were re-seated without even having the time to tremble.

With Raisen Grand Canyon to their left, and a magnificent meadow to their right, the magic driven two and four-wheelers advanced towards the west with the sun at their backs. Raising a cloud of dust on the highway as it advanced by the four-wheeler’s side, the two-wheeler went back and forth between the barren ground and the meadow by the canyon side as it roared noisily, merrily even.

“… Seems like Shia is in a good mood. She even shouted just like those guys from the end of the century.”

“… Hmm. I also want to try it.”

In the four-wheeler’s driver seat, Hajime muttered with an amazed expression with one hand steering the vehicle, while the elbow of his other hand was on the window frame. Just as Hajime said, Shia was not riding on the four-wheeler. She was driving the two-wheeler alone.

To begin with, Shia truly liked the feeling of cutting through the wind as the two-wheeler advanced, but the number of people had increased recently and their main

transportation method changed to that of the four-wheeler, which made her dissatisfied. Though she could feel the wind if she put her head out the window, she could not be satisfied with that and she could not stick to Hajime like when they used the two-wheeler because the seat next to him was reserved for Yue. Thus, she asked Hajime to teach her how to drive the two-wheeler.

The magic-driven two-wheeler could be operated easily as long as one could use direct magic power manipulation. Depending on the circumstances, direct magic power manipulation could also be used to control the steering without the need to grip it. Thus, this was not that difficult for Shia, and she quickly learned how to drive it. Following that, she became enamoured with the two-wheeler.

Even now, she moved left and right while squeaking, she even drifted and popped a wheelie. Furthermore, she also did jackknife and backride techniques which would not lose to a professional extreme motorcycle stunt artist. The acceleration and braking could be done by manipulating her magic power, so it was far easier to operate than the one on Earth… Still, she kept up with Hajime's pace. Shia's rabbit ears even said, "Hey, hey, what do you think about my technique?" as they sometimes turned towards Hajime with a somewhat cheeky expression, which was simply irritating.

Occasionally, there were those whose character would change when they drive, and Shia might be one of them. Seeing Shia, Yue by Hajime's side also wanted to try driving it herself. Yue even said, "Hyahha—!" but Hajime decided to absolutely stop her as he felt the mood would become awful. Also, beside Hajime was the three or four year-old Myuu putting her head out of the window at Yue's side, as she steadily climbed from Yue's lap with sparkling eyes. Pointing her hand towards Shia, who began to stand while steering with one hand, Myuu began pleading to Hajime.

"Papa! Papa! Myuu also wants to do that!"

"I already said you can't."

Sitting on Yue's lap, Myuu, whose wish was denied began to whine and said, "No! Myuu wants to!" to Hajime. So as to not let the whining Myuu fall from the seat, Yue hugged her from behind and scolded her with, "…don't whine!" "Uu~" Myuu raised a cute groan and Hajime showed a face as though to say it couldn't be helped towards the depressed Myuu.

"Myuu. I'll drive it with you later, so be patient."

"Ehh~? Really?"

"Mhm. I won't permit you to board it with Shia… but it's okay if it is with me."

"So, Myuu can't drive it with Shia-oneechan?"

"Mhm, absolutely. Just look at her. This time she's making a strange pose while steering. Though something come to my mind… I absolutely won't let you get on the vehicle with someone who drives dangerously."

Standing above the steer, Shia raised an American-like laughter while making a strange pose where her right hand's fingers spreaded and hid her face while her left arm hung down with the shoulder slightly raised. As he stared at Shia who made Joke-like pose, Hajime pointed at Myuu. *'Don't copy Shia, okay?'*, he said.

"To begin with, I don't want you to get on the two-wheeler because it'll be dangerous… should I make a child seat? The materials will be… *mumble, mumble*."

"Yue-oneechan. Papa is mumbling. How strange."

"… Hajime papa is just worried about Myuu… unexpectedly overprotective."

"Fufu, does it mean Master is an unexpectedly indulgent person? Hmm, this gap somehow… haa, haa."

"Yue-oneechan. Tio-oneechan is panting."

"… It is an incurable disease so just ignore her."

Serving as Myuu's conversation partner, Yue patted Myuu's head, who was gazing up at her.

Only a little time had passed since they started traveling with Myuu, but Hajime had already given up about Myuu calling him, "Papa." At first, he used every possible means to change the way she called him, but Myuu began to tear up every time, and her trembling eyes silently appealed, "Is it bad? Does Papa hate Myuu?" Even Hajime, who was capable of beating the demonic beasts in the abyss to a pulp could not win against Myuu, just like how he could not go against Yue. Resultantly, he could not change it and it was established that he would be called "Papa."

As he allowed (he gave up) her to call him "Papa," Hajime began to worry about Myuu. Even now, it could be said he was being overprotective. *Shia is a shameless rabbit while Tio is a pervert, so I must protect Myuu until she returns to her mother!* or so he thought. During the time when he begins to be too meddlesome, Yue was the one who became the stopper, as well as the one in charge of teaching Myuu about common sense, and that's the current composition of Hajime's party.

Because Myuu was glued to Hajime, Yue couldn't flirt with him, and she became somewhat dissatisfied, but she felt it could not be helped since she had also come to adore the cute Myuu.

While silently firing her magic towards Tio, who was panting and concentrating on her delusion in the back seat to silence her, Yue was covering Myuu's ears since it would be bad for her education. Thus, with Hajime who was still mumbling about making the seat for Myuu, and Shia on the two-wheeler with only the rear wheel touching the ground, *I must keep calm!* Yue made an empty resolve.

* * *

Hajime's party were currently at the Post Town, Holad.

Normally they would just pass through here, but because of a request from the head of Fhuren branch Adventurer Guild, Ilwa, they must stop on their way here. Even so, it didn't take too much time as they passed here along their way to «Guryuu-en Great Desert».

Hajime walked towards Holad branch guild along the main street with nostalgic gaze. Riding on Hajime's shoulders, Myuu noticed his state and used her small hand to tap on Hajime in curiosity.

"Papa? Did something happened?"

"Nn? Ah~, well, I've come here before… though it's only been four months, it feels like years to me…"

"… Hajime, are you okay?"

Yue, whose hands were affixed on Hajime's arm, had a complex expression while looking at him anxiously. Hajime shrugged and his atmosphere returned to the usual in the next moment.

"Ah, there's no problem. It's just that, I was absorbed in my emotions because it's been such a long time. I remember that everything started here… After a night spent in tension, fear, and even desperation, I went to the dungeon on the next day… and then I fell."

"…"

Hajime felt that in a way, that day could be called a fateful day. His monologue made Yue and the girls listen to him in a serious mood. Yue was silently looking at Hajime. And Tio asked Hajime questions out of curiosity.

"Hmm. Dost Master want to return to that day? After all, there's the case of Master's companions, too, right? Though Master hast his own circumstances… After all, thither's not only those whom hast hurteth master, right? Was thither not someone master got along with?"

Because Tio's relationship with Hajime's party was still shallow, she would sometimes frankly ask about things she should be careful about even though she knew what was going through Hajime's mind. It was because she didn't want to only become a travel companion, so Tio put forth great effort to truly become a comrade in Hajime's party. Although she was a pervert, in a way she favored Hajime.

That's why Hajime listened to Tio's question without being bothered by it. Thus, he exhaled and recalled the midnight tea party under the moonlight. With the unpalatable tea, there was the white negligee and black hair which reflected the moonlight, whose owner swore to protect him, and at the last moment, she stretched her hand out towards him with a bitter expression as her companions pinioned her…

Unexpectedly, he felt a trembling hand on his arm which made him regain his senses. When he looked at the source, Yue was looking straight at him with strong, resolute gaze, and her trembling hand tightly grasped Hajime's sleeve.

Hajime matched Yue's gaze and returned to silently gazing at her with a soft and gentle gaze.

"Certainly, there was someone… However, even if I could return to those days, I will still tread on this path of mine."

"Heh~, why?"

Although she knew the answer from Hajime's expression, Tio still asked with a slightly amused expression. Without averting his gaze from Yue, Hajime used his other hand to gently grasp Yue's hand which was grasping his sleeve. Yue had a faintly smiling expression, and her cheeks were slightly dyed in red.

"Of course… it's because I want to meet Yue."

"… Hajime."

In the town of Holad, «Orcus Great Dungeon» made it possible to raise level quickly while selling the magic stones within the safety margin. Thus, Adventurers, Mercenaries, and Kingdom Soldiers gathered, together with a lot of merchants as

their partner in business. The town displayed serious hustle and bustle. Naturally, the main street of such a town would have increased bustle.

Within the main street where a lot of people were doing their activities, Hajime and Yue suddenly halted and were looking at each other. They created their own world without minding their surroundings. They reached out to each other's cheeks, and their atmosphere looked like they were about to kiss at any moment. Though they had somewhat gathered a crowd around them, and they were showered by gazes filled with curiosity and jealousy, Hajime and Yue didn't notice them at all. They could only see each other.

"Tio-san, did you hear that? It isn't "you" that Hajime-san wants to meet, is it? It's only Yue-san. Once again, they created their own world. They don't even care about their location and situation. And we can only watch them from the side, can't we?

I feel it is about the time that such an atmosphere should be created between me and Hajime-san. Even though I'm always prepared to receive such treatment, it always passed me by, and to be treated as a regrettable character… No, I understand, you know? I know Yue-san is special. I yearn for a relationship just like those two, that's why I want to stay together with them.

What I mean is, it's natural Yue-san is special and I feel it's a good thing. Rather, Hajime-san who neglects Yue-san is not Hajime-san. If that happens and Yue-san becomes sad because of it, I'll be the one who beat Hajime-san to a pulp.

However, it is a however, kay? Recently, Hajime-san has become slightly dere~ I wonder if it's about time I climb the stairs to adulthood~ I expected that, but it didn't come true. No matter how special Yue-san is, wouldn't it okay for Hajime-san to look at me a little more? It is shameful for a man to refuse a woman's offer.

Even though it was easily understood that I welcomed him, he sloppily answered with a composed face to ignore it, this dimwit!, I thought so, but I never thought of complaining. I just want to flirt! Then, doing this and that on the bed! Even the hardcore play he did with Yue-san! I thought of those! So, what does Tio-san, the representative of all perverts, think!?"

"Sh-Shia. This one knows thou hast saved up thy resentment, but calm down. Rather, the one who shouted while not paying attention to the location is art thou. Also, to casually speak ill of this one in the end… To be treated as a pervert in such a public place, haa, haa, made everyone look at this one with cold gazes… Haa, haa, ngh, ngh."

In the middle of the main street, the rabbit-eared girl shouted she wanted to do erotic things while speaking ill of the perverted beautiful woman whom began

panting due to the atmosphere. The people who had gathered due to their curiosity were taken aback and they backed away.

"Papa~, Shia-oneechan and Tio-oneechan are…"

"Myuu. Don't look at them. Just act as if we don't know them."

"…Shia… next time, I will tie Hajime and together with Shia…"

Shia's shout was noticed by Hajime and Yue, and they returned to their senses. However, for now, they acted as though they didn't know either Shia or Tio, and not looked at them because Myuu had become dumbfounded.

Although Yue whispered something frightening, Hajime decided he didn't hear anything. But if he was worried about it, he would think of the possibility of the trap the next time he is with Yue. But he wanted to be pardoned from doing that. *If it is Yue, such a thing… would not… happen, right? Surely, probably… it'll be safe even though there's a previous offense!* Hajime tried to persuade himself.

Because from the distance, *What's with this commotion!*, the town guards could be seen everywhere, Hajime reluctantly dragged Shia and Tio by the scruff of their necks to get out of this place. Every time they went to the town, gazes filled with envy and jealousy pierced Hajime who was surrounded by beautiful girls and beautiful woman… However, he didn't know why only this time he felt there were a lot of sympathetic gazes. Surely it's only his imagination.

* * *

Ignoring the gazes of the people, Hajime's party finally arrived at Holad branch Adventurer Guild. With Myuu on his shoulders just like before, Hajime opened the guild's door. Unlike the one in the other towns, the Holad branch's door was made of metal. The heavy sound became a signal that someone was entering the building.

It was the first time he came here, since the last time he was in town, he neither had business here nor did he had the time to go to the adventurer guild. The atmosphere inside Holad branch was just like an adventurer guild Hajime had expected from the beginning.

There were broken parts of the walls and floor which were roughly patched up. Mud and stains from something were here and there, giving an insanitary impression. The interior was just like the other branches where the counter was near the entrance with a restaurant on the left. However, unlike the other branches, alcohol was served here, and there were old men hanging around to drink during the daytime. There was also the second floor where Adventurer-like people were looking down by the

handrails. The people in the second floor gave off the atmosphere of a strong group. He didn't know if it was an unspoken rule, but high-ranked Adventurers seemed to be on the second floor.

The atmosphere around the Adventurers was also different from the other towns. Everyone was glaring at them, and there was none of the heartwarming atmosphere compared to the one in Brook town. It could be said to be natural, because the Adventurers and Mercenaries were filled with spirit since these experts in battle and fighting demonic beasts would voluntarily enter the dungeon.

However, there was a tense atmosphere inside the guild and something seemed unusual. Something had obviously occurred since the Adventurers had serious expressions.

At the moment Hajime's party entered the guild, the Adventurers turned their gazes towards them simultaneously. Their gazes were so sharp, that it felt like it would be able to penetrate through them which made Myuu, who was still riding on Hajime's shoulders, to shout, "Eeek!," and she quickly clung to Hajime's head. Because Hajime appeared with a little girl on his shoulders while being surrounded by pretty girls and a beautiful woman, the Adventurers began to let out their bloodlust which contained various meaning. Myuu trembled even more. She was put down from Hajime's shoulders, and was now held with his right hand. Myuu buried her head on Hajime's chest to completely shut herself out of the surroundings.

With a youthful vigor, rather the Adventurers were just intoxicated by their own vigor, some of them began to stand from their seats. "Let's beat up this brat," was what their gazes implied, with an outburst of anger to release their resentment came from guild wrapped in bizarre atmosphere, and it was obvious they disliked Hajime's party.

There was a possibility Hajime's party were clients… but these Adventurers seemed to have never thought of that. The talk would be after they beat him up or something like that, and those who thought so, stepped forward towards Hajime.

However, Hajime, who recently became Papa, was an overprotective one. Even though it was temporary, he could not remain silent if someone frightened his daughter. Veins had already popped up on Hajime's forehead and, contrary to his hand which was gently calming Myuu, his gaze was fierce.

Thus…

BaaaANG!!

As if that sound could be heard, a dense, enormous, and fierce pressure mercilessly attacked the Adventurers aiming at Hajime's party. The bloodlust that previously came from the Adventurers was a childish tantrum compared to this. As if carrying physical force, too, the immature Adventurers immediately lost their consciousness while all of the standing Adventurers were re-seated without being given the time to tremble.

Even those who didn't lose their consciousness from Hajime's pressure, "Pressure" and "Magic Power Emission," were desperately supporting their body and consciousness while most were trembling with pale faces, and with cold sweat.

After a moment that felt like an eternity, the pressure weakened. The Adventurers used that chance to frantically take a breath. Though there were those who accidentally pissed and vomited on themselves… Hajime was smirking to them while he spoke.

"Oi, to those aiming at us."

"""""""""!"""""""""

The Adventurers were surprised and shaken by Hajime's voice. The gazes that timidly looked at Hajime had fear stuck in them as if they were looking at a monster. However, without caring about such a thing, Hajime demanded… ordered them.

"Laugh."

"""""""""Eh?"""""""""

The Adventurers were puzzled due to the situation, ignoring order. So, Hajime continued his words.

"Did you not hear me? I said, laugh. Smile. Appeal to her that there's nothing to be afraid of. Waves your hands, too. This child is frightened because of you. What will you do if she gets traumatized by it? Ah? Ah? So, amend for it."

Then, don't bring such a young child here!, was what the Adventurers wanted to retort, but they could not since the other party was a monster. Because Hajime's sharp gaze pierced the puzzled them, they frantically tried to force a smile even though their cheeks were extremely stiff. Along with that, they began to wave their hands, too.

The appearance of the the fierce looking men with good body builds floating smile with cramped cheeks while lightly waving their hands, was truly surreal. However, without worrying about such things, Hajime nodded and whispered to Myuu whose face was buried in Hajime's chest.

Because of what he said, Myuu timidly raised her face, and her moistened eyes looked up to Hajime. Next, she slowly turned around while being urged by Hajime's gaze. Naturally, there were the fierce and trained people desperately trying to look friendly.

"Eeek!"

As expected, Myuu was still frightened and returned to Hajime's chest. Hajime frowned. With more piercing glare at the Adventurers that said, "Bastard, what's with this!" "Don't be unreasonable!," was what the Adventurers rebutted in their minds, and they finally turned their gazes towards Yue and the others by Hajime's side to plead for help.

Receiving their gazes, "Haa~," Yue sighed deeply, approached Myuu, and whispered something to her ear similar to what Hajime had done earlier. Thus, Myuu once again timidly raised her face and looked at the Adventurers. The Adventurers panickedly tried to look friendly.

For a while, Myuu silently watched the Adventurers and, as if she understood something, she smiled and waved her small hand back. Because her smile and gesture were so lovely, the trained men inadvertently calmed down while forgetting the situation. Hajime was also satisfied, and once again carried Myuu on his shoulders. Then, he walked towards the counter as though he didn't have any more interest in the Adventurers.

The moment Hajime's party arrived before the counter, ignoring the crumbling sounds that rang out here and there, they told their purpose to the receptionist.

By the way, the receptionist, a girl, was a lovely one. A cheerful girl who was at least as old as Hajime. It seemed the usual template was here. But most noticeable was the tension and big confusion that appeared on the attractive receptionist's expression.

"Is the branch head here? I have a letter from Fhuren branch head… but he said to personally hand it over."

As he said so, Hajime presented his status plate to the receptionist. Although she seemed to be filled with tension, the receptionist sat up and received the status plate just like a pro.

"Th-Thank you. You can entrust it to me. E-excuse me, just what kind of request did the Fhuren's… branch head had?"

Normally, no mere adventurer would receive any request from a branch head, so the receptionist displayed a slightly dubious expression. However, her eyes opened wide when she saw the information displayed by Hajime's status plate.

"G-"Gold" rank!?"

Among Adventurers, not even 10% of them were "Gold" ranked. Thus, all of the guild personnel were told about the "Gold" rank ones so they would be able to recognize them. Naturally, this receptionist also knew of all the "Gold" ranked Adventurers. However, she unintentionally leaked a surprised voice because she didn't know about Hajime.

Her voice made the Adventurers, guild staff members, and everyone inside the guild building opened their eyes wide in surprise. And just like the receptionist, they stared at Hajime. The building interior became noisy.

The receptionist turned pale as she realized she just exposed an individual's information loudly. Thus, she began to bow at tremendous pace.

"I-I am sorry! I truly am sorry about it!"

"Ah~, no need for that. It's not like I mind it. So, can you convey this to the branch head now?"

"Y-Yes! Please wait for a moment!"

The receptionist who seemed as though she would continue to apologize if he didn't say anything made Hajime smile wryly. After the small battle in UI and the great rampage that annihilated an underground organization in Fhuren, he thought it'd already be too late to try to hide his identity.

The "Gold" ranked adventurer boy who brought along a child and a harem of pretty girls as well as a beautiful woman made him gather attention inside the guild building. Nevertheless, Hajime's party gave off a clear attitude that it was the usual as they waited for the receptionist. Unaccustomed to being in the center of attention, Myuu felt uncomfortable, only to be comforted by everyone in Hajime's party. Because the way Tio comforted her was bad for Myuu's education, a slap visited her cheek. Thus, it raised further commotion, but was ignored as expected.

Before long, rather not even five minutes had passed, someone ran from inside the interior with loud footsteps. Hajime's party paid attention to the sound and wondered what happened. A boy clad in black jumped out from the passage behind the counter and skidded on the floor due to the momentum. As though he was looking for someone, the boy began to look around.

Hajime remembered the person. He was dumbfounded since he never thought he would meet him again in such a place, and thus he muttered inadvertently.

"… Endou?"

Chapter 5 : To Accomplish One's Obligation

"… Endou?"

Hajime's mutter made the black-clothed boy, Endou Kousuke, respond with "!," a response similar to a certain cardboard-loving mercenary when an enemy appeared in a game. He kept looking around and began to shout as if he was irritated, because he could not find the one he was looking for.

"Nagumoo! Are you here!? Is it really you!? Where are you!? Nagumoo! Come out if you're alive! Nagumo Hajimee—!"

Because his shout was too loud, one by one people began to shut their ears with their fingers. His voice was filled with desperation since he wanted to ascertain whether the should be dead classmate of his had survived.

Yue and the girls turned their gazes towards Hajime. With an expression as if he didn't want to be involved in this, Hajime scratched his cheek and spoke towards Endou who repeatedly shouted his name out loud.

"Ah~, Endou? I can hear you just fine so stop repeatedly shouting my name."

"!? Nagumo! Where are you!?"

Endou turned his face towards Hajime, reacting to Hajime's voice. Hajime was inadvertently taken aback because Endou looked so desperate.

For a moment, Endou's gaze met Hajime's, but he immediately averted his gaze and began to look around again.

"Damn it! I can't see him even though I can hear his voice! Is he a ghost now? As expected, he returned as a ghost!? So that's why I cannot see him!?"

"No, I am right in front of you, you big idiot. Rather, calm down already. You whose thinness shadow ranked the best in the whole world."

"!? Again, his voice!? Wait, whose shadow did you say was so thin that even the convenience store's automatic door didn't react to it and disappears from time to time! The automatic door opened at least one of three tries!"

"So, it didn't open two times in three tries… as expected of you."

After conversing that much, Endou finally noticed the source was the white-haired, eye-patched boy before him and he began to carefully observe Hajime's face. Towards Hajime, who averted his face since he felt unpleasant due to not having a hobby where he'd be pleased from being watched by a man, Endou spoke as if he could not believe what he perceived.

"Y-You… are you… Nagumo?"

"Haa… yeah, that's right. Though I look like this now, I am Nagumo Hajime."

As he carefully observed Hajime from head to toe, Endou became dubious because Hajime was quite different from the one in his memory, but he finally believed Hajime after looking at his features and how he knew about the thinness of his shadow.

"So… you are alive."

"Of course, after all I am right before you now."

"Somehow, no you have completely changed… Your looks, atmosphere, and tone…"

"I crawled up from that abyss with my own power, you know? So, of course, I've changed."

"I-Is that so? No, but, I see… You really are alive…"

Although Endou was perplexed by Hajime's blunt attitude, his gaze softened as he was relieved that the classmate he thought to be dead was alive. No matter how he envied him like the other boys because Kaori paid attention to Hajime, and how he pretended to not see Hiyama's gang bullying Hajime, nothing was more frightening than thinking Hajime had died. Hajime's death had such a great impact. That's why Endou was purely glad his classmate was alive.

"Rather… when did you become an Adventurer? Moreover, a "Gold"…"

"Nn~, well it just happened."

After Hajime replied, Endou's expression completely changed. The relieved expression he had because his classmate was alive, had changed into an expression

as if he was in a pinch. Hajime looked at Endou again and he noticed Endou was in ragtag state. He tilted his head, wondering what had happened.

"… In other words, you came back alive from the depths of the dungeon by yourself, and became strong enough to gain the Adventurers' highest rank? That's rather unbelievable…"

"Well, that's true though."

After Hajime confirmed what Endou said with a serious expression as the truth, Endou sprang up towards Hajime and gripped his shoulders, and in a voice filled with more desperation than before, he began to speak in sorrow.

"Then, please! Please enter the dungeon with me! We must hurry or else everyone will be dead! We need someone with battle potential even if it is just one person! There's also the possibility that Kentarou and Kondou have died! That's why please help us, Nagumo!"

"W-Wait a sec. What's with you all of a sudden!? I don't know the situation, you know? So what's with the dead thing? And can't Amanogawa somehow do something about it? There's also Commander Meld, so there's no need to worry about another failure like when we faced the Behemoth…"

Hajime perplexedly asked back because even though he usually didn't stand, out Endou wore an expression as if he was truly at his wits' end. And at the moment Endou heard Commander Meld name, he fell to his knees with a truly dark expression. Next, he muttered with a low, subdued voice.

"… –ad."

"Hah? I can't hear you. So, what did you say?"

"… I said they are dead! Commander Meld, Alan-san, and the other Knights are dead! All of the Knights who entered the dungeon are dead! They died to let me escape! Because of me! They are dead! They died!"

"… I see."

"They died," Endou said repeatedly like a child throwing a tantrum, and Hajime only replied with two words.

Hajime's class was not a fighting one, so he didn't have much encounter with Commander Meld. However, he remembered that Commander Meld was a good person, and he recalled that Commander Meld believed the "incompetent" him

before Hajime fell into the abyss. If it was Hajime who just got out of the abyss and heard of Meld's death, he would have probably just said, "So what?" However, the current him thought it was little regrettable. At the very least, he prayed for their happiness in the next world in his mind.

"So, what happened?"

"That's…"

Still on his knees, Endou tried to explain the situation to answer Hajime's question, while he hung his head. However, a hoarse voice interrupted him.

"Please continue your conversation inside. After all, you are my guests."

The owner of the voice was a powerful man with a good body build, and had a large scar on his left eye who was around 60 years of age. It was obvious his eye had the ability to perceive the situation, polished for years, and ambition was overflowing from his body.

With the previous receptionist by the man's side, Hajime guessed the man must be the head of this guild branch. And because Endou's wails and shouts made the guild atmosphere returned to one of high tension similar to the time Hajime's party entered the hall, he thought this was not an appropriate place to have such a talk, and obediently followed the man.

Endou had probably already made such a commotion earlier, and exposed that something had happened to the Hero's group and the Knights. And that was the cause of the strange atmosphere when Hajime's party entered the guild.

The man Hajime thought of as the branch head grab Endou's arm to force him to stand up and lead them to the guild interior without saying anything. Endou was considerably emotionally unstable, and currently had lost all of his strength.

Because the content would not be something pleasant, Hajime's party moved after the man while expecting the unpleasant.

* * *

"… Demon… race, huh."

Hajime's mutter rang out inside the reception room of Holad branch Adventurer guild. Seated on the sofa before him were the Holad branch's head, Lorr Vauabith, and Endou Kousuke, and seated beside Hajime were Yue, Shia with Tio at Shia's side. Myuu was sitting on Hajime's lap.

Hajime's first response after hearing the situation from Endou was something Endou had said during his explanation. The talk of how the Hero's party was attacked by the demon race and was in pinch, made Endou and Lorr's put on serious expressions, and the room was filled with an oppressive atmosphere.

…Or so it should be, but the little girl sitting on Hajime's lap was munching on the snacks, and it made her cheeks swell up like a squirrel, so she didn't even notice the serious atmosphere. The conversation between Hajime and the others was slightly difficult for Myuu, and she could feel the uneasy atmosphere. However, Hajime gave her a snack so to divert her attention from being uneasy.

"More importantly! What's with that!? Who's that child!? Why is she eating the cake!? Doesn't she understand the situation!? Everyone might have be dead, you know!"

"Eeek!? Papa!"

Unable to endure Myuu's existence, who destroyed the mood in the room, Endou stood up and said with an angry voice while pointing at her. Surprised, Myuu raised a small scream and clung to Hajime.

Naturally, bloodlust far above an ordinary person could emit, overflowed from Hajime. Papa would not forgive his daughter's enemy.

"Bastard… Who are you to snarl at Myuu, ah? AH? Should I kill you?"

"Eeek!?"

Screaming just like Myuu, Endou dropped into the sofa. Because of what Hajime said, "…Really, Hajime is completely a Papa now," or "Before, Hajime-san casually said "our child", right~," or "In the end, this one wonders whether Master will be able to separate from this child once we arrive at Elizen~," could be heard only to be ignored by him. It was more important for him to calm the frightened Myuu.

While Hajime calming Myuu down, he leered at trembling Endou trembling after he had collapsed into the sofa. Lorr entered the conversation with an amazed expression.

"How then, Hajime. I have roughly understood your situation from Ilwa's letter. You've quite the rampage, haven't you?"

"Well, all of them were just the course of events."

Although they were not situations that normally appeared as the course of events, Hajime who shrugged his shoulders as though nothing big had happened, made Lorr curve the edge of his lips, finding it amusing.

"From the letter, with the acceptance of you as "Gold" rank, it was written that you want to be accommodated in the best possible way. I've roughly understood the situation… but to annihilate around 60,000 demonic beasts with just a handful of people, and decimate the underground organization based in Fhuren in just half a day… that is something unbelievable. But for Ilwa to purposely tell me this through a letter… I won't think it is strange if someone said you are actually one of the Demon Lords now."

Lorr's words made Endou opened his eyes wide to show how surprised he was. Even though he thought Hajime must've gotten stronger since he had escaped from the depths of «Orcus Great Dungeon», he thought Hajime was still weaker than himself.

After all, Hajime's class was "Transmutation Master," which was a non-fighting class, and he was also called as "incompetent." Even if someone said he was "Gold" rank, it was just the standard of being an Adventurer in this different world, and couldn't be compared to those summoned here. That's why he thought, at the very least, Hajime should be able to repair the destroyed teleportation circle and become his support in battle.

To begin with, Endou came to the Adventurers' guild to ask high ranked Adventurers to help him in rescuing Kouki's party. Surely even if he could not take them to the dungeon depth, they would at least be able to protect the area around the teleportation circle. And though there were also stationed knights, they would not do anything before they reported this to the Kingdom, and their level was so low that at most they could do was protect the teleportation circle on 30th floor. He needed Adventurers with at least "Silver" rank to protect the 70th floor's teleportation circle.

He entered the Adventurer guild with such thoughts and grandly exposed the current situation to those in second floor. He thought he could ask for the Adventurers' cooperation, for heroes, who were the humanity's hope, fell into such a predicament along with the annihilation of the Elite Knights. However, in addition to the unexpected request to protect 70th floor's teleportation circle, made everyone avert their gazes and at the same time, uneasiness about what would happen to the humanity spreaded.

Noticing the commotion, Loor grabbed Endou by the scruff of his neck and dragged him inside to question him, when the receptionist ran inside with Hajime's status plate.

As such, Endou noticed he had underestimated Hajime's ability and the possibility that Hajime was even more powerful than him made, Endou astonished when he compared the current and past Hajime.

Even though Endou was stiffened due to the shock, Lorr and Hajime's talk kept advancing.

"Please don't say such a stupid thing… How could you think we are as weak as the Demon Lords?"

"Hmm, so even Demon Lords are small fries, huh? What confidence… But, if that's the truth, I want you to receive a commission with Holad branch Adventurer guild's head as the referral."

"… Rescuing the heroes, right?"

Endou returned to his senses when he heard the word rescue. Next, he leaned forward and spoke to Hajime.

"Th-That's it! Nagumo! Come with me and help them! If you are that strong, we can surely save everyone!"

"…"

Although Endou's eyes shined because he could see the hope, but Hajime's reaction was an unfavorable one. He was looking at the distance as though he was thinking of something. Endou naturally had thought Hajime would surely help him to rescue the others, so he was perplexed because there was no prompt answer.

"What's with you!? Even now, they might be dying, you know! Don't hesitate! Aren't we comrades!?"

"… Comrades?"

Hajime, who averted his gaze earlier while thinking of something, was once again looking back at the heated up Endou with a cold expression. Endou instinctively backed away due to the coldness in Hajime's eyes. He hesitated after recalling Hajime's earlier bloodlust, but he obstinately answered because Hajime was a valuable force that could not be missed.

"Y-Yeah. We are comrades! So it's natural to he—…"

"Don't selfishly make me your comrade. Frankly, I only recognize you as nothing but a human 'from the same world,' no more, no less. You are no different than the others."

"Wh—!? Why… why did you say that…"

Hajime's unexpectedly cold words and leer made Endou confused. Hajime resumed thinking, in other words, he thought of the demerits from rescuing Kouki's party.

Just as Hajime said, he recognized the classmates as nothing more than acquaintances. Until now, he neither thought of using his power to return to the way he was in the past, nor revenge. He was truly disinterested and thought them as trivial things.

However, he could not just bluntly answer with a "NO." As for the reason, he connected that answer to the words Aiko said, "lonely way of life."

Furthermore, Hajime recalled the conversation under the moonlight. Having been called "incompetent" and "weakest" in this different world, there was the girl who said to Hajime, "I will protect Nagumo-kun." In the end, Hajime was reckless and disappeared as he fell into the abyss, just like what the girl was uneasy about. She had promised "to protect him" to remove her uneasiness, but that promise could not be accomplished. And somehow, Hajime had frequently recalled the time he was about to fall into the abyss and the girl who outstretched her hand with bitter expression after returning to this town.

"Shirasaki… is she safe?"

Hajime muttered and asked the confused Endou. Letting out, "Eh?," a dubious voice because of the sudden question, Endou panickedly began to speak about Kaori since he thought Hajime would not cooperate if he didn't say anything.

"Y-Yeah. Shirasaki-san is safe. Rather, we would not have survived if not for her. Jyuugo and Yaegashi-san were dying from the first attack… but Shirasaki-san was truly amazing. Her healing magic was unbelievable, rather… she turned ghastly since the day you fell, you know? She trained so hard, so much that we wanted to stop her… and her aura also changed? She somehow looked mature as though she was always thinking of something, and the fluffy atmosphere around her had disappeared…"

"… I see."

Hajime only replied as such to the Endou who frantically talked even about the unnecessary things. Thus, Hajime looked at his precious partner who watched him as he scratched his head.

"… If it's something Hajime wants to do, I'll follow you to wherever it is."

"… Yue."

With affectionate gaze, Yue said so and quietly grasped Hajime's hand. Hajime returned her grasp, watched her gently, and thanked her.

"M-Me too! I'll follow Hajime-san to wherever it is! Hajime-san!"

"Hmph, of course this one will, too. Master."
"Umm, umm, that's, Myuu, too!"

Because Hajime and Yue began to create their own world, Shia and Tio panicky asserted. Although she didn't understand it well, Myuu clung and insisted so because she didn't want to be left behind.

Before them, Endou said, "Eh? What's with this harem…," with an amazed expression to which Hajime responded with a leer, while telling his comrades what he wanted to do.

"Everyone, thank you. Although I don't want to purposely make connection between us and the God chosen Heroes… I have someone I'm indebted to. That's why, I thought to at least help. Well, if it's them then they might be able to do something themselves."

Hajime's real intention was not to help Kouki's party. He didn't want to purposely approach either the Heroes or the Mad God who chose them.

However, he thought to at least show his face to Kaori who pushed herself to find him. In addition, he'd help her if she was truly in a pinch. In other words, he had an obligation to Kaori who wanted to protect him and still believed his survival even now.

He didn't even worry about the risk involved. He had fought the four-eyed wolf in Endou's story, and the Chimeras' strength should be below tenth floor of Abyss dungeon, so there was no problem at all.

"E-Excuse me, so, will you go with him?"

"Ah, branch head Lorr. For now, I also want to request something from you…"

"You don't want to be seen unconditionally helping them by the ones above, right?"

"Yes. There's one more thing. I want you lend me a room for Myuu until we return."

"Ah, I don't mind."

Resultantly, Endou who breathed a sigh of relief because Hajime would come with him, was ignored while Hajime continued his conversation with Lorr.

As expected, he could not just take a child into the depth of the dungeon, so he entrusted Myuu to the guild. Although Myuu fiercely resisted, somehow everyone was able to calm her down, and Tio was entrusted with baby-sitting and guarding her. Finally, Hajime's party were able to depart with Endou as their guide.

"Oi, guide us quickly, Endou."

"Uwah, don't kick my butt! Rather, you are changing too much!"

"How noisy. As for the time, a day… No, let's end this in half a day. Though reluctant, we left Myuu behind, so we need to return quickly. I'm also worried because she's with that pervert."

"…You, so you really are her father… To create a harem of beautiful girls… just what has happened to turn that Nagumo into this…"

While dashing towards the depth of the dungeon, Endou muttered, trying to comprehend something from Hajime's attitude and the surroundings. With such powerful help, Endou's mind regained some composure. If he had the time to talk, he wanted to use it to run faster since he had confidence in his high agility, but it had been smashed to pieces. In addition, Endou was praying for his best friends' safety.

Chapter 6 : The Hero's Defeat

"Uh…"

"Suzu-chan!"

"Suzu!"

With Suzu raising a groan and slowly opening her eyes, Kaori and Eri who were always beside her, called Suzu's name with anxious voices mixed with relief. Suzu

spaced out for a while with only her gaze moving around, and finally opened her mouth.

“I-I don’t know this ceiling~.”

“Suzu, I know you like acting, but wouldn’t it be better if you didn’t say something like that at time like this?”

She should be thirsty. However, Suzu desperately said so with hoarse voice, which made Shizuku retorted in a half-amazed, half-praising tone when she heard her. Afterwards, Suzu moistened her throat using the water from the leather flask by her side.

With lovely sound of gulping, Suzu, who sated her thirst, said, “I’m revived! Literally!,” words that couldn’t be taken as a joke, and she tried her best to stand up with Kaori and Eri supporting her. The class’s moodmaker who regained her consciousness from a critical condition, radiated a cheerful atmosphere which made the classmates who had been depressed until now show smiles.

However, the bright atmosphere was very contrary to Suzu’s complexion. She was exhausted and suffered blood loss. With a pale face and thin lines below her eyes just like a bear’s, her smile looked miserable. Some parts of her body were pierced, but it was unmistakably her “strength” to be able to smile as soon as she got up. Shizuku and Kaori watched her with respect.

“Suzu-chan. It’s okay for you to rest some more. After all, your blood shouldn’t have been replenished yet, even if your wounds have recovered…”

“U~n, so that’s why I feel dizzy~. That bastard~, to pierce the beautiful Suzu… even though, “Can I penetrate you now?,” is better to be said in bed!”

“Suzu! That’s vulgar! Be more prudent!”

Suzu said while hatefully gazing at empty space, and Eri scolded Suzu with flushed cheeks. Some of the male students inadvertently, “Bff!?,” but averted their gazes due to Shizuku’s glare.

“Suzu, thank God you woke up. We were worried, you know?”

“Yo, are you really okay? Isn’t your face completely pale?”

Because Suzu suddenly caused a commotion after she woke up, Kouki and Ryuutarou approached her. While being weakened for a period of time as an effect from using “Limit Break,” Kouki became depressed because they were severely

beaten. However, he seemed to have recovered somehow since a moderate amount of time had passed after they had retreated and hid where they currently were.

“Morning~, Kouki-kun, Ryuutarou-kun! Looks like we somehow got away, huh? Umm, is everyone saf—… Wait, one is missing…”

“Yeah, it’s Endou. He retreated ahead alone. We think he should be able to break through the floors alone by hiding himself…”

After greeting Kouki and Ryuutarou with a smile, Suzu noticed one person was missing from the surrounding classmates. Suzu had lost her consciousness in the midst of battle, so Kouki and the others answered her doubt while they explained the current situation.

Incidentally, Kondou and Saitou had been de-petrified, woke up earlier than Suzu, and had already been debriefed of the situation.

“I see, looks like a lot of time had passed since Suzu fainted… Ah, that’s right. Kaorin, thanks! Kaorin has become Suzu’s life benefactor!”

“Suzu-chan, it’s my duty to heal everyone. So don’t exaggerate it by calling me your life benefactor because it was a natural thing for me to do.”

“Heh~, even stoic Kaorin is wonderful! Shall we get married?”

“Suzu… it’s eerie if you say that with pale face. For now, shouldn’t you rest some more?”

Suzu was scolded by Eri while she was clinging to Kaori. If she over did it, Shizuku would physically stop her. It was the usual way of things. Even the classmates who wondered whether they’d be able to survive and return to surface again, gradually regained their composure thanks to Suzu and the girls’ conversation that didn’t mind their defeat.

However, the atmosphere which was starting to turn bright was douse with water by a person who always ruin the ambience.

“…What are you grinning about? We almost died, you know? Moreover, our situation hasn’t changed even now! Think of how we can get out of here if you have time to joke around!”

The one who shouted while glaring at Suzu was Kondou Reiichi. And though he didn’t express it, Saitou Yoshiki by his side also watched her with criticizing gaze.

"Oi, Kondou. Can you not say such a thing? Suzu only did this to change the moo—…"

"Shut up! It's not like you can say anything to me! After all, you lost! I almost died! Shit! What a Hero you are!"

Although Kouki tried to admonish Kondou due to his remark, Kondou suddenly burst like fire that got poured with oil and began to criticize Kouki.

"Bastard… Thanks to whom do you think we could retreat, huh? We could do that because Kouki opened a path for us!"

"To begin with, there's no need for us to retreat if he wins! More importantly, we obviously had our chance. It would have been all right for us to receive the invitation from Demon Race and defeat them later! But, you selfishly started the fight! Everything is your fault! This is your responsibility!"

This time, Ryuutarou began to admonish such a Kondou. Kondou stood up and confronted Ryuurarou. Sympathizing with Kondou, Saitou and Nakano also stood up and faced Ryuutarou.

"Ryuutarou, I am okay… I'll accept my responsibility, Kondou. We won't lose this time! We already understood the characteristics of the demonic beasts, and we won't get attacked by surprise again. So, we will absolutely win this time!"

Although Kouki made a gesture where he clasped his clenched fist, Saitou muttered with darkened eyes.

"… But, you could not win even with "Limit Break."

"Th-That's… i-it'll be okay now!"

"Why?"

"I'll use "Divine Might" and attack the Demon Race woman from the beginning. That's why, if everyone could cover me…"

"But, won't she know a troublesome attack is coming with such a long chant? Even our enemies will have their own plans, right? Besides, we don't know if those were all of the demonic beasts she has."

Even if Kouki said it'd be okay, Kondou and gang complained while beginning to doubt Kouki's ability, and were looking at him with doubtful eyes. With this, even though Kouki could not help but take responsibility to make sure they win. They

would not calm down because of the fact that they had almost died as a result of the enemies' unbelievable strength and number.

The main cause for them to heat up were because Ryuutarou had a low angry point while Kondou and gang were being belligerent by objecting constantly. Gradually, Ayako, Yoshino, and Nomura tried to stop their quarrel, but a dangerous mood began to drift around.

As such, Ryuutarou began to ready his fists while Kondou readied his spear. Tension immediately filled their location. Kouki shouted, *Ryuutarou!*, and grip his shoulder to stop him. However, Ryuutarou could not be stopped and veins popped on his head while glaring at Kondou. Even Kondou and gang were partly obstinate about it.

"Everyone, please calm down! No matter what you say, we can only bet on Kouki to survive! We must defeat the Demon Race woman even if Kouki was at the time limit of his "Limit Break." We can only do that since she won't let us escape. You understand that, right?"

Shizuku entered between them and frantically tried to persuade them to calm down, but it didn't work either. Swaying while standing, Suzu seemed to not want to hear what Kondou said even if he apologized. Finally, Kaori thought she needed to restrain everyone and began to prepare her restraining magic… when they heard something.

"Grrrrr…"

"""" !?""""

A growl. A growl so familiar, so low that came from the bottom of abdomen. The appearances of Chimeras and the four-red-eyed wolves crossed their minds. The dangerous mood immediately dissipated and everyone stiffened. Even the smallest breathing seemed to resound, and their breathing became smaller. Their gazes turned towards the passage camouflaged as a wall before them.

Whoosh! Fwiiish, Whooosh! Fwuuush!

Sounds of scratching and rough nasal breathing could be heard from the wall. Someone was gulping. Even trace of their smells should've been erased by Endou, so the demonic beasts shouldn't be able to perceive that Kouki's party were inside no matter how strong they were. Even though they thought so, they were tensed and unpleasant sweats flowed.

Some time was still needed before they completely recovered. Suzu was not in condition to fight, Kaori and Ayako had used too much magic to heal the others and had hardly recovered. The vanguard group were almost fully recovered, but the magic users in the rear group only had recovered half of their magic power. The healing potions they had also been exhausted, so they still need to wait for sometimes to recover at the earliest.

They could not overlook the holes in terms of roles created by Kaori and Ayako as the healers and the barrier user, Suzu. That's why Kouki's party were hoping they would not be found out now as they watched the wall separating the outside and the hidden room.

The demonic beasts wandered outside for a while, but their presences gradually began to fade before long. Thus, silence returned once again. Even so, everyone was standing still for a while, and breathed great sighs of relief when they knew the demonic beasts had completely disappeared; some of them crumpled on the spot. The extreme tension made their sweats overflow like a flood.

"…We'll be found out if we keep making a commotion. That's why, please just calm down and recover for now."

"Y-Yeah…"

"Y-You are right…"

Shizuku wiped the sweat off her cheek which fell and created weird *dripping* sound. Kondou and the others replied while stammering and withdrew their arms. It was as though they got doused by cold water.

Having thought the crisis was through, everyone relaxed… and at that moment,

"ROOOOOOARRRRR!!!"

BOOOM!!!

The wall separating the hidden room and the outside was crushed to pieces along with a tremendous roar.

"Uwah!?"

"Kyaaaa!!"

The wall's fragments were blown like bullets due to the impact into the hidden room, and hit Kondou and Yoshino who were in its trajectory. The two spontaneously fell flat on their butts as they raised screams.

In the next moment, before the dumbfounded Kouki's party were the incoming blurred spaces whom they still didn't want to meet.

"Prepare to fight!"

"Damn it! How did they find us!"

While ordering so, Kouki immediately drew and slashed the Chimeras with the Holy Sword. They didn't move because they would lose sight of the enemies if they distanced themselves from them. As he cursed, Ryuutarou positioned himself before the passage connected to the outside, and tried to prevent the demonic beasts from invading any more than this.

However,

"RooOOoAR!!"
"GROoowwwWL!!"

A Brutal-look-alike immediately hurled its steel-like body like a cannonball into the room. Thus, it grappled into Ryuutarou with tremendous momentum and pushed him down.

Using that chance, tens of black cats dashed into the room and immediately fired tens of tentacles. Fired like a barrage, they mercilessly attacked Kondou and the others who remained on their spots. And though Kondou and the others immediately readied their weapons, the tentacles were too much in number and would skewer them as-is.
?????????? ??

"——"Heaven Interruption"!"
"——"Heaven Interruption"!"

15 shields of light slantly appeared in the space before Kondou and the others and managed to deviate the trajectories of the attacks. To be capable of activating the shields even with such short chants would make anyone marveled. Ten of the shields were Suzu's, while the other five were Kaori's.

However, even though they immediately cast them, Suzu's physical condition was still in a bad shape while Kaori's magic power was still exhausted. Those facts affected the strenght of the shields.

Whiiiish! Fwooosh! Whiiiish! Fwooosh! Whiiiish! Fwooosh!

They should've been able to change the trajectories and endure the impact, but vigorous attacks from the tentacles broke the shields one after another. Thus, several of the tentacles' trajectories could not be changed by the crushed shields and attacked Nakano and Saitou. The two immediately bend their bodies. Since both were in the rear group, their physical strength weren't that high. Because of that, even though they avoided mortal wound, Nakano shoulder and Saitou's thigh were gouged, and they raised screams as they were thrown to the ground.

"Shinji! Yoshiki! Shit! Daisuke, help them!"

"… Ah, of course."

Always brooding over something since they escaped into the hidden room, Hiyama did not pay much attention to what Kondou said. However, the situation didn't let him say anything otherwise, so he dragged the wounded Nakano and Saitou towards Suzu's side. Even though her physical condition was not good, the area around Suzu, whose magic power still had a lot remaining, was the safest. Besides, they would be easily healed by Kaori at Suzu's side.

"Kuh, Kouki! Use "Limit Break" and get outside! We will do something about these guys inside this room!"

"But, Suzu and the others cannot move…"

"We will face them as-is! Please! Break through them and kill the Demon Race woman!"

"Kouki! Leave this place to us! I absolutely won't let them die!"

"…Okay! I will leave this place to you! "Limit Break"!"

After thinking about Shizuku and Ryuutarou's words for a moment, he thought it was certainly the only way to break through this situation. With a resolute expression, Kouki activated "Limit Break" for the second time today. The reason "Limit Break" must not be used for more than once a day was because it put considerable burden into the body. That's why, "Limit Break" which usually had an eight minute limit, but it might be shorter now. Expecting that, Kouki would ignore the others and only concentrate on defeating the Demon Race woman, he went out of the hidden room.

Going out of the room into the huge octagonal room, before Kouki's eyes were a large amount of demonic beasts. And within the stationary demonic beasts stood the

Demon Race woman looking at him with cold eyes, and a white crow on her shoulder. The inside of Kouki's mind was boiling with a sense of mission to save his comrades and anger that they were put into such a predicament. Thus, he glared straight at the Demon Race woman.

"Hmph, you made me waste too much time. I also have other missions too…"

"Shut up! I will surely defeat you! Prepare yourself!"

Declaring so, Kouki used short chant, and magic power was immediately sent into the Holy Sword. "Divine Might" would normally reach the Demon Race woman, but even so, he used the chant omission version of "Divine Might" since he believed it would be able to open a path for him.

However, the Demon Race woman showed a smile before the Holy Sword, whose radiance increased, and she ordered the Brutal-look-alike standing by near her to drag something from the back.

Kouki put a dubious expression at first which then turned into an aghast expression when he saw that "something." He instinctively lowered the Holy Sword with eyes wide opened and called his name with a trembling voice.

"… M-Meld-san?"

That's right, there was the dying Meld whose limbs were crushed and whole body drenched in blood being dragged by the Brutal-look-alike by the scruff of his neck. With a glance, his whole body was limp and seemed to have died, but sometimes small groans arose and demonstrated that he was alive.

"Y-You! Let go of Meld-san—!?"

Kouki was enraged because of Meld's state, and in a split moment, he tried to rush towards the Demon Race woman, losing himself. Suddenly, a huge shadow shrouded over Kouki as though it had been waiting for such exquisite timing. *Hah*, before Kouki noticed it and turned his gaze, there was the spectacle's wall-like fist approaching him with tremendous momentum that made even the air exploded.

BaAAaaM!!!

Although Kouki spontaneously used his left arm to guard, the fist swung with tremendous force easily crushed his guard, and Kouki's left arm and body received a powerful impact. Kouki flew towards a wall and crashed into it with tremendous speed incomparable to being run over by a dump truck. The wall behind him was crushed radically by the impact.

"GaaAH!"

Because of the impact he had taken, Kouki air was released from his lungs, and he slipped down from the wall, in all fours. Kouki desperately tried to support his body using his healthy right arm, but a lot of blood flowed from his mouth. The earlier attack had most likely damaged his organs. He might have died instantly if it wasn't for the skill derived from "Physical Resistance," "Mitigation of Impact."

In addition, because of a concussion to his head, he desperately tried to understand the situation even with an unfocused gaze. Then, he saw it. A three meter, huge demonic beast was in the location where Kouki was before, with its fist thrusted.

It had a horse-like head where fangs grew, four thick heavy arms growing from its muscular body, and its lower half was that of a monstrous gorilla. Glaring at Kouki with bloodshot eyes, steam gushed out from the long horse-like mouth every time it breathed. Its atmosphere was obviously different from the demonic beasts he had faced until now.

The horsehead withdrew its fist and immediately rushed out while firing a dense bloodlust to the still unable-to-stand Kouki mercilessly. Jumping only a little away from the place where Kouki was crouching, it swung its fist down with tremendous momentum towards Kouki. Because of the warning from his instincts, Kouki laid on the ground and rolled over, desperately getting out of his location.

KABOOOM!!!

Immediately, the horsehead's fist pierced the ground and at the same time, a reddish black ripple extended on the ground along with a roar. The destruction was just like an explosion. This was the horsehead's peculiar magic, "Magic Shock Wave." It was an ability to convert magic power into a shockwave. However, as simple as it might be, it was an immensely powerful peculiar magic.

Due to the skill derived from "Physical Resistance," "Recovery Rate Increased," Kouki somehow recovered from his head concussion. He desperately stood up and readied the Holy Sword. At that time, the horsehead had already approached before him and swung its fist once again.

With a crushed left arm, Kouki used Holy Sword as a shield and the impact received by his right arm blew him away again. Afterwards, even though Kouki managed to avoid a mortal wound, the four arms sent out "Magic Shock Wave" with all of their might, and he, whose movement had slowed down due to the damage from the first impact, couldn't counter attack at all.

“Kuuu! What’s with this thing’s strength! Even though I should be strengthened by “Limit Break”!”

“RUUUUAAAA!!”

With pained expression, Kouki was frustrated because the horsehead demonic beast could overpower him who was under “Limit Break,” and he went for a counterattack, prepared for damages while thinking he couldn’t let it continue.

However…

THUD!

“Kh!?”

Right before he began, the limit of Kouki’s “Limit Break” had arrived, and power suddenly left him. Because he used it twice in such a short time, he was attacked by powerlessness incomparable to what he felt earlier, and he fell on his knee with no power entering his legs.

The horsehead didn’t miss that chance. With him suddenly losing his power and balance, Kouki was in a hopeless situation as the horsehead’s fist, *bam!*, hit his abdomen with a sound of impact.

“GAaAH!”

Splurting blood, Kouki’s body was made into ‹ shape, blown away, and crashed into the wall once again. Being weakened thanks to the side effect of “Limit Break,” Kouki’s consciousness was drifting away. Being mortally injured, he fell down without even twitching. Rather, it was strange for him not to die instantly in his current state. Perhaps the horsehead was taking it easy so he wouldn’t.

The horsehead approached Kouki and lifted him by grabbing the back of his neck. The unconscious and completely powerless Kouki was hung by the horsehead to show his state to the Demon Race woman. The Demon Race woman nodded in satisfaction and ordered the demonic beasts that rushed into the hidden room to withdraw.

After a while, Shizuku and the others went out with full caution.Their expressions were dyed in despair when they saw the powerless Kouki being lifted by the huge horse-headed demonic beast they had never seen before.

Chapter 7 : Accompanied By A Red Thunder

"It's a lie… right? How can Kouki… lose?"

"N-No way…"

"N-No… w-why…"

Coming out from the hidden room, Kouki's comrades were bewildered in seeing him being hung, and they uttered incoherent words. Even Shizuku, Kaori, and Suzu were speechless. Towards the classmates who had lost their fighting spirit, the Demon Race woman spoke with a cold attitude.

"Hmm, it looks like I'll be able to catch you guys easily. I… have underestimated you brats, but it looks like it'll work out just fine."

With a pale expression, Shizuku asked the Demon Race woman with courageous tone.

"… What did you do?"

"Nn? It's this, you know this."

After replying to the question, the Demon Race woman turned her gaze towards Commander Meld who was gripped by a Brutal-look-alike even now. Following her gaze, Shizuku came to understand the moment she saw the dying Commander Meld. Commander Meld was used to divert Kouki's attention. If his acquaintance was caught and was dying, Kouki would surely react to it. Furthermore, he would've considerably lost his composure.

The Demon Race woman had most likely to understood Kouki's straight forward character from their previous fight. Thus, using Chimera's peculiar ability, she hid a strong demonic beast who aimed at the moment Kouki jumped in anger.

"… So? What do you want from us? You must want something since you're purposely letting us live and started to converse with us, right?"

"Ah, as expected, you're the one who can understand situation the best. What, it's not such a special conversation. When I saw you guys earlier, I thought to once again invite you guys. Look, before, it was this Hero-kun who selfishly decided everything, right? And, there are also excellent people among you, so I want ask you again. So? What do you think?"

Some people reacted to the Demon Race woman's words. Because of that, Shizuku narrowed her eyes and questioned the woman again.

"… What about Kouki?"

"Fufu, what a fast learner… Sorry, but I can't let Hero-kun alive. He didn't want to come to our side, so it's impossible to persuade him, right? After all, he is the self-contained type. That's why I don't have any reason to keep such a dangerous creature alive."

"… Isn't that the same with us?"

"Of course; why did you think I let you live even though I know it'll only make me anxious of my back?"

"Haven't you thought that we might joined now and betray you later?"

"Naturally, I have thought that. That's why I'll make you wear collars. Ah, there's no need to worry, it's only make you unable to rebel against us. No one will be deprived of their freedoms."

"That's just like slaves with high degree of freedom. What you mean is we will keep our free will, but we won't be able to harm you."

"That's right. It helps me that you're quick to understand. Also, it's good that this conversation is going somewhere until the one with Hero-kun."

Although the classmates were silently listening to the conversation between Shizuku and the Demon Race, they were also looking at each other with fear-stricken eyes and full of worries. If they did not accept the invitation from Demon Race, then nine out of ten they would be killed by the demonic beasts that were even difficult for Kouki to defeat, but they would not be able to fight against Demon Race again if they sided with Demon Race and wore the collar.

In other words, they would no longer be "God's Apostles." If it turned to that, would Church of the Saints whom they had been summoned to protect became useless… and, would it be possible for them to return to their original world…

No matter what option they chose, they could not see a bright future. However…

"I-I think we should accept that person's invitation!"

Among the silent crowd, Eri unexpectedly desperately spoke while trembling. Thus, the classmates opened their eyes wide in surprise, and carefully paid attention to her. To such an Eri, Ryuutarou shouted back with face red in anger.

"Eri, you! So, you are going to abandon Kouki!"

"Hih!?"

"Ryuutarou, please calm down! Eri, why do you think so?"

Ryuutarou's attitude made Eri frightened, and she stepped back as a result. However, Shizuku admonished Ryuutarou and was somehow able to stop him. Thus, Eri took a deep breath and spoke her mind with tightly clenched fists.

"I-I just… don't want everyone to die… Even I don't know… what to do with Kouki-kun… *ugh, gulp*…"

Eri spun her words with all of her might with tearing streaming down her eyes. Seeing her, the other party members' hearts were shaken. Thus, one person who agreed with Eri appeared.

"I also agree with Nakamura. Our lost has already been decided; between annihilation and survival, there's no need to hesitate, right?"

"Hiyama… you mean, you don't care what happen to Kouki, huh? Huh?"

"Then, Sakagami, are you trying to do double suicide with Kouki who could not fight anymore? And with all of us involved?"

"That's not it! As if I'd do that!"

"Then please shut your mouth if you don't have any alternative. Right now, it should take precedence on how to survive by ourselves."

With Hiyama's remark, the atmosphere turned into one where it looked like it was necessary for them to accept the invitation. And just like what Hiyama said, they only had one choice if they wanted to survive.

However, they could not just choose that since they felt guilty, thinking, *'Is it really okay for us to survive while Kouki gets killed?* It was as though they were boldly sacrificing Kouki for their survival.

To their dilemma, the Demon Race woman made another proposal with such perfect timing.

"Hmmm, if you guys are that worried about Hero-kun… shall I keep him alive? Naturally, a collar with stronger effect than yours will be put on him. But, I want all of you to side with Demon Race first."

Shizuku secretly clicked her tongue when she heard the proposal. It was because she had guessed since the beginning that the Demon Race woman would propose it. It was strange for Kouki to be kept alive if she had already decided to kill him. The woman only had to kill him if there was no need for discussion after all.

That's why by not killing him and keeping him alive were all for this moment. The Demon Race woman had likely acknowledged that Kouki and the others were useful after the last fight. However, she was convinced she could not make Kouki waver even through talking. But the others didn't know of that. So, she planned to draw in the others aside from Kouki.

First, she did not kill Kouki to not raise the animosity of the others. Second, she told them to make a choice while she cornered them between choice of death or survival. Third, she guided them to think "if we do that," and she chose that time to erase the problem from their thought.

Actually, by making the best use of Kouki, the atmosphere changed to one where they thought it'd be okay to side with Demon Race if they survive. Though in reality, they didn't have any guarantee Kouki would be kept alive. Even if they regretted if he was killed after this, they could no longer act against the Demon Race.

Shizuku noticed that, but she kept silent as she told herself they currently could do nothing but to side with Demon Race if they want to survive. There should be a way to save Kouki as long as they were alive.

There were huge merits for the Demon Race woman if she got her hand on Shizuku and the others. First, needless to say, it'll give an impact to the human's side. After all, the "God's Apostles" who were humanity's hope are siding with Demon Race. That impact… no, it was much more like despair will be a huge advantage to the Demon Race.

Second, she would get new battle force. Having come to «Orcus Great Dungeon», the Demon Race woman's real purpose was to conquer the dungeon and bring back the power inside. Though up until now, it was at the level where she could easily sweep the floor with the demonic beasts she had on hand, but it couldn't be said that she'd be able to keep it up. It would be a good thing to obtain Shizuku and the others as fighting force to replenish the demonic beasts killed by Kouki's party.

If this keeps up, she would obtain Shizuku and the others. The Demon Race woman floated a faint smile as she realized the mood.

However, her smile was immediately erased by the pained voice that suddenly rang out.

“E-Everyone… this is bad… please run away…”

“Kouki!”

“Kouki-kun!”

“Amanogawa!”

The voice’s source was the hanged Kouki. All of his comrades’ gazes turned to him.

“… Don’t believe her… she killed… Alan-san and the other knights… don’t… be fooled… you’ll be used as slaves… to fight humans… so run away… I am… okay… just… escape by yourself…”

With feeble breathing, Kouki told the danger of the deal and insisted for them to leave him and bet on running away, which once again shook the hearts of the classmates.

“…In this situation, just how many do you think will survive? Just look at the reality already! We already lost! Even the knights… were killed! So there’s no other choice! We can do nothing but accepting the invitation if we want to survive!”

Hiyama’s angry voice rang out. He angrily looked at Kouki who still didn’t come to terms with the situation. Hiyama certainly wanted to survive. At worst, he would make sure Kaori and himself survive even if the others didn’t. However, the possibility of doing that if he bet on escaping would be too low.

If he went to the Demon Race side, there’s enough possibility of being promoted o an important position if he displayed his usefulness, and he’d be able to obtain Kaori. Naturally, he’d limit her freedom using the collar. Hiyama did not care whether she had free will or not. He’d be satisfied as long as he made Kaori his.

Because of Hiyama’s angry voice, the others were charmed by the more certain and nearer future.

At that moment, a pained but powerful voice rang inside the room. Even though it was a small voice, it resounded well to others. It was a voice that had encouraged them many times in the battlefields. The person calmly judged any kind of situations, said words without any hesitation, and a model for them who also had a reliable back. For everyone, he was like a big brother and even a father they were fond of. Meld’s voice rang out.

"Guh… you guys… you only need to think on how to survive! … Advance on the path you believed in! … I am sorry involving you… to our war… Even though the time I spent with you isn't that long… I've regretted involving you… That's why, live and return to your world… no need to worry about human race… In the first place… this war should be fought by the human in this world!"

Meld's words weren't words of a Herrlicht Kingdom's Commanding Knight. They were words of a man, Meld Loginz, his true feelings as he cast aside his position. He exposed his feelings because he realized here would be the end for him.

Kouki and the others had their eyes wide opened while muttering Meld's name and Meld shook off the Brutal-look-alike while a light shone from his whole body. Then, he immediately grappled the Demon Race woman.

"You demon… let's die together!"

"… That is… hee~, self-destruction? How brave. I can say I don't hate it."

"Shut it!"

The light wrapping Meld was similar to Kouki's "Limit Break" in a glance while magic power gushed out of his body. However, it was actually not from his body but the crystal hanging on his neck.

Seeing that, the Demon Race woman instantly saw through his personality and satisfyingly praised him.

The crystal's name was "Last Loyalty," an evil tool to self-destruct just like the Demon Race woman said. Someone with high position in the Kingdom and Church of the Saints naturally carried important information with him. And because there's magic capable of reading one's memory in dark attributed magic, that person would be forced to carry the crystal when he went to the frontline. It would be used in time of emergence so the memory could not be read, along with the intention of involving the enemy with the self-destruction.

Meld's last attack that risked his life made Kouki's party screamed out his name. However, unlike them, the Demon Race woman was still calm even though she'd be swallowed by the explosion and die.

Thus the "Last Loyalty" Meld carried increased its shine further, and one sentence was muttered right before it activated.

"Devour it, Absod."

Immediately, after the Demon Race woman's voice rang out, the "Last Loyalty" on its limit let out tremendous lights, and lost its shine.

"Wh-!? What's happen!"

If one looked carefully, the overflowing lights were flowing into a certain direction. Meld frantically moved only his gaze towards that direction while still pinning the Demon Race woman, and there was the six-legged turtle shaped demonic beast whose opened mouth was inhaling the lights wrapping Meld.

The six-legged turtle demonic beast was called Absod. Its peculiar magic was "Magic Storage." It was a skill to freely take and stock magic inside its body. On the other hand, it could not use the stored magic if more than one magic if it took different elements. It only had the ability of letting out the magic again by compressing it from its mouth. However, the storage could even store high-ranked magic. It was a natural enemy for people who fight using magic.

The light wrapping Meld from "Last Loyalty" rapidly lost, and it exhausted all its powers and became a normal crystal. Suddenly, an impact from an attack hit Meld who was flabbergasted because his last struggle had been obstructed in an unexpected way, but the impact wasn't that strong. *What is it?*, Meld looked down towards his abdomen where the impact came from.

A reddish brown blade could be seen. Accurately, a blade of sand had pierced through Meld's abdomen from his back. The blade piercing him from behind had blood dripping at the tip.

"… Meld-san!"

Kouki shouted Meld's name without minding his vomited blood. Meld reacted to his call and the gaze on his abdomen shifted to Kouki. He then frowned he moved his mouth to say, "Sorry," while revealing a mortified smile.

Immediately, the sand blade swung horizontally and Meld was blown away. Just like a powerless doll, *thud!*, he was thrown to the ground. The pool of blood spread little by little. Anyone see it would think of it as a mortal wound. It was already a miracle he was capable of moving while covered in wounds, but everyone knew that this time it was the true end.

Even though she understood she would not make it in time, Kaori immediately used ranged recovery magic on Meld. Although the amount of bleeding had slightly decreased, Kaori could not block Meld's wound since she herself hardly have any magic power.

“Uu, please! Be healed!”

Even as she fell to her knee due to the severe exhaustion from magic power depletion, Kaori desperately continued using healing magic.

“I never thought he’d be able to stand up and pinned me with such wounds. As expected of the Kingdom’s Knight Leader. He’s worthy of praise. However, this is the end… this’ll be your last. So, what do you think?”

The Demon Race woman glared at Kouki and the others as she swung the sand blade dyed in red. Seeing someone close to them dying once again, everyone, except some, were trembling. Even if they didn’t want to admit it, they’d be the next to die if they did not accept the Demon Race woman’s proposal.

Representing the others, Hiyama was about to say they accept the proposal. However, at that time,

“… –me.”

Kouki, who powerlessly tried to escape from being hung by the horsehead, muttered something with a small voice. Even though he shouldn’t be able to create any miracle since he covered in wounds, Hiyama swallowed his words. He somehow could not ignore the pressure coming from Kouki.

“Ha? What did you say? So, you want to die.”

The Demon Race woman heard Kouki’s mutter, she snorted, and asked him thinking it was just another rave. Kouki raised his cast down gaze, and his straight glare pierced the Demon Race woman.

The Demon Race woman instinctively held her breath when she saw Kouki’s glare. After all, the color of his irises had changed to silvery white as it shone. Instinctively backing away due to an unknown pressure, she ordered the horsehead according to the warning her instinct was telling her. She instinctively realized it was not the time to think about the advantage and disadvantage of gaining Shizuku and the others.

“Ahatd! Kill him!”

“RoOoOoAaR!!”

The horsehead nameded Ahatd faithfully executed the Demon Race woman’s order. It tried to crush the suspended Kouki’s sides using two fists equipped with “Magic Shock Wave.”

However, at that moment,

CLiiIIInnNG!!

Tremendous light overflowed from Kouki. It became a torrent and rose into the ceiling just like a tornado. Next, Kouki swung his right fist towards Ahatd's arm that was grabbing onto him, *SNaaaAAAAP!*, and the arm was easily crushed.

"ROooOOAR!!"

With a roar different from a while ago, Ahatd inadvertently dropped Kouki, and Kouki moved to make a roundhouse kick as though he could not feel his injury.

ThUuUumpP!!

Cannon-like impact sound rang when the kick hit, Ahatd's huge body was bent into < and was blown towards the wall behind with an extraordinary momentum. Ahatd, who was crushed into the wall accompanied with a thunderous roar, could not move well its body thanks to the impact, desperately trying to slip out of the wall but resulted in nothing.

With a swaying body, Kouki picked up the dropped Holy Sword and glared at the Demon Race woman with a piercing gaze that could almost kill. At the same time, similar torrent that of a tonado rose and began to envelope Kouki's body.

A skill derived from "Limit Break," "Supreme Break." If the normal "Limit Break" increased the basic states by three times within the time limit, "Supreme Break" was higher skill, and basic stats were multiplied by five. However, he had to use limit break to now forcibly dragged out his power. That's why the current Kouki only had 30 seconds until the limit. The effective time had been cut greatly because of the side effect.

However, without minding that, Kouki rushed towards the Demon Race woman in anger. The only thing in his mind was to beat Meld's enemy. Only revenge.

The Demon Race woman raised a panicked expression and ordered the surrounding demonic beasts to attack Kouki. Chimeras were sneaked attacking, the black cats were firing their tentacles, and the Brutal-look-alike swung their maces. However, Kouki ignored those demonic beasts. Without swinging Holy Sword, he kept advancing, and raised angry cry towards where the Demon Race woman was.

"Bitch-! How dare you do that to Meld-san-!!"

"Tch!"

Kouki unhesitatingly swung down the Holy Sword that was held in upper stance. The Demon Race woman clicked her tongue and she immediately densified the sand into a shield… but cladded in torrent of light, the Holy Sword easily cut through the shield and slashed the Demon Race woman behind it.

Although she was not cut in two; she backed away and created the sand shield, the Demon Race woman had a deeply cut diagonally on her body, and blown backward, spraying blood.

Her back crashed into the wall behind, the Demon Race woman skidded down from the crushed wall, and Kouki approached her as he shook of the blood off the Holy Sword.

"What luck… to have the situation reversed just like this… It's as if I am looking at a cheap drama."

Having the table reversed thanks to him awakening his hidden power due to him being in a pinch, made the Demon Race woman say sarcastic words while her wandering gaze was looking at the approaching Kouki in resignation.

Even though the white crow on her side activated its peculiar magic, her wound was too deep that it could not be healed immediately, and Kouki won't give her such a time either. It was a true checkmate, and the Demon Race woman endured the severe pain, moved her right hand, and took out a locket pendant from her breast pocket.

Seeing that, Kouki sharpened his expression, thinking it was the same self-destruction tool similar to the one Meld used, and he suddenly dashed out. Regardless of the Demon Race woman's death, he could not let the explosion swallow his comrades. *That's why, I will defeat her before it activates!* He attacked to stop her.

However…

"I am sorry… I am going to die before you… I love you, Mikhail…"

Looking at the locket pendant in her hand dearly, the Demon Race woman muttered, which made Kouki inadvertently stopped the Holy Sword. Due to the attack not being delivered, the Demon Race woman dubiously raised her face and she noticed the Holy Sword had stopped just a few millimeters overhead.

Kouki expression was aghast as he looked down at the Demon Race woman with wide-open eyes. His eyes expressed, but when he noticed something, it generated fear and hesitation. Seeing his eyes, the Demon Race woman realized the thing that

made him stopped his sword and watched him with a condemning gaze. Her gaze made Kouki shaken further.

"… I am amazed… Did you notice it only now? That you are going to kill a 'person.'?"

"Kh!?"

That's right, for Kouki, the Demon Race was a cruel and cowardly higher ranked demonic beasts. It also meant they were recognized as existences evolved from demonic beasts, that was what the Ishtar had taught him about the Demon Race. Actually, they were recognized as such because they were accompanied by the demonic beasts, their slaves. However, just like a normal human, they love and loved, desperately tried to survive for the sake of something. But Kouki never thought he was going to fight "people." In a way, it could be said he unconsciously did not want to think so…

The recognition was overturned when the Demon Race woman dearly called the name of her loved person. Whether he liked it or not, the one he was fighting was not a demonic beast. He noticed she was in truth a "person" just like him. He recognized what he was trying to do was "murder."

"Surely, you did not admit us as "people"… What arrogance."

"N-No… I, I didn't know…"

"Hah, isn't it you "did not try to know"?"

"I, I…"

"See? So, what's wrong? After all, what you're doing is not fighting but "hunting," right? There's one animal before you here, you know? Even though you have thought like that until now…"

"… L-let's just talk… surely if we talk…"

Kouki said as he lowered Holy Sword. Demon Race woman looked at him with pure scorn, and she shouted an order instead of answering him.

"Ahatd! Aim at the swordswoman! The others, attack!"

Having recovered from the impact, Ahatd approached Shizuku with tremendous momentum, exactly what the Demon Race woman had ordered. Within Kouki's party, although her charisma to lead people could not be compared to him, to excel

in making calm judgement of the situation made her the most troublesome enemy, so Shizuku was the first to be targeted.

The others demonic beasts also began attacking the other party members. Rather than the merits gained by making them betray their allies with attached collars, she judged, because of his last attack, it was necessary to kill Kouki. The Demon Race woman felt Kouki's latest attack was a threat.

"Wh-, why!"

"You're a boy without any self-awareness… we are at "war!" You who possessed huge power with immature mind is too dangerous! You are going to die here no matter what! Look, your comrades will be annihilated if you don't help them!"

Kouki shouted at the Demon Race woman who ignored his suggestion, but the woman didn't care at all.

Next, Kouki turned around because of the woman's words, and at the same time, Shizuku was blown away and she crashed into the ground. Ahatd was already a monster that had already far surpassed the strong demonic beasts. It overpowered Kouki who was using "Limit Break" even if it was just a surprise attack. So, Shizuku should not be able to fight it by herself.

Kouki turned pale and used the power from "Supreme Break" to instantly move between Ahatd and Shizuku, and caught the "Magic Shock Wave" attack. Next, he counter-attacked by swinging Holy Sword which cut off its arms.

However, by the time he was before its bosom to finish it off with a stab, just like before, he fell to his knees, lost his strength, and fell forward.

"Supreme Limit" had reached its time limit. It was the worst case scenario. Not only was weakened because of the after effect he had accumulated one impossible plight after another, he also could not move his body as though he was paralyzed.

"A-At Such a time!"

"Kouki!"

Covering Kouki, Shizuku slashed towards the wound Ahatd had on its arm that was cut off. Unable to calm down after its wound was slashed, Ahatd screamed and retreated. At that moment, Shizuku grabbed and threw Kouki to where their comrades were.

With Kouki incapable of moving, his comrades could only defend against the encircling demonic beasts. *Then… I must do something!* Shizuku aimed at the Demon Race woman. Her gaze unmistakably carried killing intent.

"…Heh~. You seem be conscious about the murder. Rather, aren't you the one most suitable to be called as Hero?"

"… I don't care. It is our fault Kouki did not realize it. That's why I will pay for that debt!"

Completely healed by the white crow's peculiar magic, the Demon Race woman stood up steadily and commented on Shizuku actions.

Shizuku should have known Kouki's straightforward character, and how deeply he sets his heart on something. She gritted her teeth because she felt responsible that it was only until now that Kouki realized they were killing people, and how he didn't realize their true enemies during this war.

Shizuku had no experience of murder, and she felt she did not want to experience it either. However, she was prepared such a day would come if she was going into a war. By learning swordsmanship, the "heaviness" of hurting people was driven into her.

However, now that the time has come, her resolution was easily shaken because of fear neither from the shame nor honour, but because she wanted to cry due to the thing she was going to do. Even so, she bit her lip and gritted her teeth to desperately suppress her fear.

Thus, she took a stance as she activated "No Beat" to kill the Demon Race woman using the Godspeed from the sword drawing technique. However in that moment, a chill ran along her spine because her instinct warned her to imminent danger. Immediately, from the side of the location where she jumped back from, a black cat's tentacles was fired.

"I never told the other demonic beasts to not aim at you. Do you think you can kill me with Ahatd and other demonic beasts as your enemies."

"Kuh."

Saying, "Of course I am also going to kill you," the Demon Race woman began to chant. Shizuku somehow managed to break through the waves of attacks from the demonic beasts using acceleration and deceleration without preliminary action of "No Beat," but her expression was gradually dyed in despair when she tried to move before the Demon Race woman through an opening.

The most difficult was that Ahatd had speed similar to Shizuku. The sturdy and gigantic figure was certainly seen by Shizuku, so even if she used the chance to jump towards the Demon Race woman, its swung fist give an explosion-like impact that would immediately reach Shizuku.

Shizuku was a swordsman who specialized in speed, so her defense was extremely brittle. Evasion and parry were the basic of her defense. Besides, damages would accumulated little by little from "Magic Shock Wave"'s after effect. Also, she could neither completely evade nor parry.

Following that, Shizuku's movement had slightly become duller because of the accumulated damages. And that was fatal in a fight to death such as this.

WHHAAAAAM!!

"Aghh!!"

Although she immediately used the sword and sheath as shields, Ahatd's fist crushed Shizuku's partner and hit her shoulder. Having blown parallel to the ground, forcefully crashing, and continued skidding on the ground, Shizuku laid down helplessly. The arm on her right shoulder was bent into an impossible angle. It was completely crushed. And because the impact was passed into her body, she sometimes coughed up blood.

"Shizuku-chan!"

Kaori called Shizuku with tone overflowed with uneasiness, but Shizuku could not move at all even as she gripped the handle of her broken sword while crouching.

At that time, the things about her comrades, formation, and her exhausted magic power, there was be no meaning for her to come to Shizuku's side, but other logical reasons had completely disappeared from her mind. Kaori's only thought was she "must go to her important best friend's side."

Kaori dashed out due to impulse. Her body was swaying and her feet weren't steady because she hardly had any magic power. Although there were voices behind that tried to stop her, they did not reach Kaori's ears. She was only trying her best to recklessly rush towards Shizuku. Naturally, the demonic beasts did not overlook the defenseless Kaori, and merciless attacks poured towards her.

However, all of those attacks were received by shining shields. Moreover, the numerous shields were standing just like a passage between Kaori and Shizuku.

"Ehehe. As expected, being alone is unpleasant."

Suzu said with a pale expression. She held out her right hand straight towards Shizuku, and used all of her shields to make a beeline between Kaori and Shizuku. A faint smile floated on her face.

Suzu had realized it herself. Realized they could not survive at all. That's why, she thought of using her magic to allow her to be together with the best friends she loved even in the last moment. Naturally, the defense on the other comrades had become thinner as the effect… so Suzu, "I am sorry," apologized in her mind, and continued to put up her shields for Kaori and Shizuku.

With Suzu's shields, Kaori reached Shizuku with only few wounds. Then, she embraced Shizuku's body tightly.

"K-Kaori… what are you doing… Get back, hurry. It's dangerous here."

"Uun. It is the same anywhere. That's why, it's okay for me to be by Shizuku-chan's side."

"… I am sorry. I can't win."

"Me, too, I am sorry I can't really do anything. I have hardly any magic power."

Supporting Shizuku, Kaori was frowning while smiling while using her magic to lessen Shizuku's pain. Shizuku on the other hand, used her solid right arm to grasp the hand Kaori was using to support her, and sported a troubled smile.

A shadow appeared before the two. It was Ahatd. With bloodshot eyes, it approached and looked down at Kaori and Shizuku. "RoOoOaR!!," it raised its characteristic roar and swung its thick arm.

Unbeknownst to them, Suzu's shields had been put between Ahatd, and Kaori and Shizuku to interrupt it from coming any closer. However, it just ignore such barriers. It was probably because it was convinced that its swung fist would easily destroy the shields just like papers and use the shockwave to crush Kaori and Shizuku.

Currently, with the iron hammer of death swinging before them, various scenes passed through Kaori's mind. "Ah, I wonder is this the revolving lantern?," and she strangely calmed down, but Kaori who was flooded with memories had her heart shaken by the latest scene that appeared.

It was the tea party under the moonlight. The memories of the two conversing. The night when she said a vow. The disappeared him who made a troubled smile. How she began to realize her "love" once he disappeared. How she chased after him, believing in his survival.

However, those would also end here. “In the end, I was once again unable to hold up my promise,” thinking so, tears flowed on Kaori’s cheeks before she was aware of it.

First, I want to call out to him if we ever meet again, Kaori thought so. *With such a wish, at the very least, I will call his name at the end…* and she naturally said.

“… Hajime-kun.”

At that moment.

KABOoOoOM!!

The ceiling above Ahatd fell with a roaring sound, and at the same time, a huge, jet-black stake flew out with an extreme power cladded in red thunder.

Raising sparks, the jet-black stake pierced through Ahatd as though it was a tofu, and it then pierced and was stuck on the ground.

With length around 120 centimeters, the huge stake buried itself into the ground while releasing red sparks. Flesh and blood scattered from the center where Ahatd’s remains were with its original form nowhere to be seen. The spectacle made Kaori, Shizuku, and of course Kouki’s party, the demonic beasts attacking them, and the Demon Race woman stiffened.

A silent unbecoming of a battlefield ruled the room. No one, not even a thing understood what had happened as they stood in bewilderment. Suddenly, a shadow jumped down from the opened ceiling. The person landed and lightly trampled down on the Ahatd’s remains with his back before Kaori and Shizuku, and when he got off it, the person glared at the surroundings.

When he looked over his shoulder, he saw Kaori and Shizuku who were embracing each other.

The moment the person turned around, their eyes met, and a lightning ran through Kaori’s body. Her heart had been cold accompanied by sorrow, no, probably it was freezing since the day her important person disappeared, but a sudden fire lighted it and heated it up *Thu-thump, thu-thump.* Her heart began to throb intensely.

“…Your relationship is good as usual, you two.”

The person said with a wry smile, and Kaori’s mind was filled with delight even before she could think about it.

The hair color was different, the aura was different, the tone was different, and the appearance was different. However, she knew. It is him. It is he whose survival she believed in while she looked for him.

That's right,

"Hajime-kun!"

Chapter 8 : The Peerless Incompetent

"Eh? Hajime-kun? Wait, Nagumo-kun? Eh? What? What do you mean?"

Kaori's ecstatic shout made Shizuku, who was by her side, confused and looked alternately between Kaori and Hajime. Apparently, Kaori was able to see through the white haired, eye-patched, black-coated person before her as Hajime with just a single glance, but Shizuku was still unable to recognize him.

However, when she saw the boy's face who was looking back over his shoulder with a wry smile, it immediately overlapped with Nagumo Hajime in her memory, and Shizuku, with widened eyes, raised a surprised voice.

"Eh? Eh? Really? Is he really Nagumo-kun? Eh? What? What's really happening here?"

"Well, just calm down, Yaegashi. Aren't calm, cool, and collected your main selling point?"

The chain of events happened after she, Shizuku, just like Kaori, was prepared to die which made her perplexed and she forgot her pain. Admonishing her as he said Shizuku's name, Hajime suddenly looked overhead, feeling their presences. Thus, the falling blond-haired girl, Yue, was caught by him in princess carry style and he carefully let her down, next he received the rabbit-eared girl, Shia, who jumped down the same way.

The last to jump down was a boy dressed in black, Endou Kousuke.

"Na-Nagumoo! You-! I was blown away by that! Wait, what was that just now!? It suddenly pierced the dungeon's floors…"

Endou looked at the surrounding, started complaining. Then, he saw his best friends and the others together with a group of demonic beasts. After noticing that he was

being watched by his stiffened classmates, “Nuoh!,” and released a strange shout. To Endou, they voices were half-filled with joy because of their reunion, and anger because he came back.

“”Kousuke!””

“Jyuugo! Kentarou! I’ve come with help!”

Reacting to “I’ve come with help,” Kouki’s party and the demon race woman finally returned to their sense. Then, they once again stared at Hajime and the two girls. However, not minding the gazes of those in his surroundings, Hajime quickly ordered Yue and Shia with a slightly irritated expression.

“Yue, sorry but please protect those people gathered there. Shia, please look at the condition of the fallen man in Knight’s armor there.”

“Nn… leave it to me.”

“Roger~!”

Yue calmly walked without caring about the surrounding demonic beasts, while Shia used her marvelous jumping power to jump overhead the group of demonic beasts and landed beside the collapsed Meld.

“Ha-Hajime-kun…”

Kaori once again called Hajime’s name with a shaking voice. Her tone was probably filled with joy due to the reunion, yet there was also sorrow. It was because she thought Hajime had came here to die. Although Kaori didn’t know the details, her expression was telling him to immediately get away from the place.

Shrugging his shoulders, he returned Kaori’s gaze. Hajime briefly said, “It’s okay now, so just wait there.” After saying that, he activated “Light Speed” which greatly improved his perception. Then, he took out three Cross Bits from “Treasure Box” which surrounded Kaori and Shizuku like shields.

The floating cross-like objects that suddenly appeared from empty space surprised Kaori and Shizuku. With his back before the two, Hajime made a proposal towards the demon race woman whose appearance could be seen as nothing but arrogance. It was his mercy since the demon race woman was still not his enemy.

“The red-haired woman over there. I won’t do anything if you leave immediately. Just disappeared quickly from here if you don’t want to die.”

"…What did you say?"

It was not a remark that could be said by an ordinary human while being surrounded by demonic beasts. It was the reason why the demon race woman inadvertently asked back. As a response, Hajime repeated himself with an amazed expression.

"Prompt decisions are needed in battlefields. That's why I said, just disappear from here quickly if you don't want to die. Understand now?"

Knowing she did not hear it wrong, the demon race woman erased her expression and ordered the demonic beasts while pointing at Hajime, "Kill him."

This time, the too abrupt situation—— especially the dead of her treasured Ahatd due to an unknown attack made the demon race woman lose her calm and make a fatal mistake.

Even if Hajime had his own objection, the woman was too enraged by Hajime who by the course of events treaded on Ahatd, a demonic beast she didn't want to lose since it was given to her by her revered superior. In addition, there was the confusion due to the unbelievable situation where the dungeon's ceiling had been destroyed just because he wanted to go downstairs. In any case, she would have been able to make a more careful judgement if it was the usual her. However, the glove had been thrown out.

"I see… So, I take it that you're an "enemy", right?"

Hajime muttered at the same time the Chimera attacked him. Behind Hajime, "Hajime-kun!" and "Nagumo-kun!" warning voices filled with urgency could be heard. However, Hajime casually clawed the Chimera attacking from his left with his artificial arm and lifted it without any difficulty.

The Chimera was surprised and struggled to escape which made the space blurred intensely. Looking at it, Hajime looked at it with scorn.

"Oi, oi, what is this? This half-assed peculiar magic. Are you a street performer?"

Because there's no meaning if one's presence and figure disappears when spaces blurs when it moves. Hajime inadvertently retorted. Even in the abyss, there were demonic beasts that could conceal their presences and figuring out what each of them has was extremely troublesome. Comparing it to them, Hajime thought it was too childish that the concealment exposed when it moved.

Standing still while he raised a Chimera with huge body weighing several hundreds kilograms as it struggling mid air, Hajime made the demon race woman, Kaori, and the others dumbfounded.

Hajime leered at them and used “Great Arm” to throw the Chimera on the ground as though he had lost his interest in it.

BoOoOoOmM!!

BaAaAaANNNG

With a raw sound ringing out, the Chimera had its head crushed and made a crater on the ground. Next, having drawn out Donner, Hajime turned the railgun towards the space that seemed to be empty at a glance and fired it in succession.

BAAANG BAAAAANNNG!!

Dry, explosive sounds rang out and two flashes cut through the air, mercilessly piercing respective targets. The space blurred for a moment, then a Chimera with a blasted head and a Brutal-look-alike whose heart had been shot through appeared. They stood still for a second, swayed, and crumbled to ground.

Not moving but could not conceal the wind flow, the shaking of the air and ground, their gazes, killing intent, flow of magic, and temperature made them nothing but unmoving targets for Hajime.

Without even looking at the demonic beasts he instantly killed, Hajime took a step forward into the battlefield, no, the execution ground. What started could not even be called deathmatch. It was a one-sided execution by the monster who shouldn’t be made into an enemy.

The demon race woman was shocked seeing the demonic beasts were killed casually and easily while the classmates stood still feeling the chill from the weapon that shouldn’t exist in this world. Leaving aside those stiffened people, the demonic beasts were attacking Hajime one after another, faithfully executing the demon race woman’s order.

A black cat creeped behind him and fired its tentacles, but Hajime didn’t turn around and only turned the wrist of his lowered arm where Donner was and fired behind. The bullet exceeding the speed of sound easily gouged through the black cat’s forehead.

Without stopping to look at their companion, four-eyed wolves rushed towards him from left and right at the same time. However, Schlag, unknown as to when it was drawn, blew the enemy on his left while Donner blown off the one on the right.

At that moment, the black cats hidden behind the annihilated four-eyed wolves shot their tentacles in cooperation with the Chimeras that were approaching Hajime's back. However, Hajime had jumped several meters above, flipped mid-air, and while hanging upside down, the floating black cats and the two Chimera, who lost sight of their target, became preys for the railgun.

Within the scattered flesh and blood that looked like flower storm, two Brutal-look-alikes came and swung their maces, aiming for the moment Hajime landed. However, such an easily predicted future wouldn't work on a monster such as Hajime, and he jumped further using "Aerodynamic" mid-air. He then fired Donner-Schlag to his left and right in succession while spinning like a top.

The released wind of killing intent not only moved towards the two Brutal-look-alikes that were waiting for him, but it also pierced and burst to pieces the heads of the Chimeras and four-eyed wolves that were approaching from behind. While each of the demonic beasts sprayed and scattered blood, Hajime descend as though to follow the law of inertia and dulled the momentum right before he landed.

Landing soundlessly in the center of the corpses and a ground dyed with blood, Hajime took out ammo from an empty space and use gunspin to reload them.

And at that time, "KuWAaAA!," a strange sound rang out all of a sudden. Hajime turned toward the source and there was the six-legged turtle-like demonic beasts, Absod, whose wide opened mouth was turned towards Hajime. Inside its mouth was a compression of tremendous power shining a pure white light.

It was the previously stored huge magic power from Commander Meld's "Last Loyalty." The "Last Loyalty"'s range was only few meters but its power was more than enough to decimate a person.

The magic power was compressed to the limit and in the next moment it was launched like a laser towards its target, Hajime. The death light approached as it gouged out the ground on its track. However, Hajime calmly took out a large, coffin-like shield from an empty space, equipped it on his left arm, and activated "Vajra" the same time he held up the shield. Just like a huge tree whose roots were firmly rooted on the ground, there was no impatience in Hajime's eyes which showed his firm will.

A tremendous roar resounded the moment the laser-like magic power hit, and the trembling air expressed how strong it was. However, Hajime, who received the

direct hit, didn't even move a step away, but rather, he sported a mischievous smile, and began to slant the shield to parry the attack. The destination of where the attack was averted to was…

"Kh!? Damn it!"

It was the demon race woman. Since the time Hajime began to easily kill the demonic beasts, she sensed the crisis and began to chant powerful magic with an exaggerated chant, but Hajime noticed it and redirect Absod's attack towards the demon race woman to obstruct her.

The unexpected situation made the demon race woman take an evasive action in a panic, but Hajime only adjusted the angle of his shield for the attack to reach her. The torrent of light approached her and destroyed the wall, made the demon race woman frantically ran on the side of the wall. Her expression was one where there was not the slightest hint of composure remained.

However, the attack gradually drew near her back, and when she thought she would be mowed down by the attack she had ordered to be released, the magic power stored by Absod had reached the bottom and the attack ended.

"Tch…"

Without any room to react to Hajime who clicked his tongue, the demon race woman breathed a sigh of relief only to be frozen in the next moment.

BaAaAaANNNG!!

An explosive sound roared along with the feeling of heat passing right beside her right cheek, and something white splattered.

That something was the remains of the white crow which was previously stood on the demon race woman's shoulder. Although things had not been going the way he expected, Hajime countered by firing Donner aiming at Absod while Schlag was aimed at the white crow.

Even if Absod tried to evade only to endure the bullet so even with its tremendous velocity, it would only leave a small sound, but it could not even sense the bullet which ended up piercing through its opened mouth and its consciousness fell into darkness for eternity.

Even the white crow had its body burst open and had died in an instant, scattering white feathers along with its flesh and blood. Receiving the after effect of the railgun, the demon race woman lost her balance, fell on her butt, and absentmindedly patted

her own cheek. What stuck there were the white crow's flesh and blood, and at the same time she felt the heat from the severe burn.

If it shifted just by a few centimeters… The demon race woman was trembling when she thought of what might have happened. In other words, Hajime whose matchless strength allowed him to playfully kill the army of demonic beasts as though he was killing bugs before her eyes, and could have also killed her at any time. Even now, her life was in the palm of his hands.

The demon race woman had a strong pride as a warrior, but she could not stop her trembling body before the monster-like existence. *What was that? Why did such a thing exist? How can I survive from that monster!?* Such thoughts filled the demon race woman's mind, and it continued to circle round and round inside her.

Kouki and the others felt the same as her. They could not immediately see through the white haired, eyepatched boy as Hajime. They could not understand who was the unknown person who easily annihilated the demonic beasts that had put them into such predicament.

"What was that…? Just who in this world is he!?"

Kouki muttered while his unmoving body was laid on the ground. Everyone around him also had the same questions forming in their minds. The one who answered was the person they asked to retreat only to return here by his own will, Endou.

"Haha, I know it is unbelievable… but he is Nagumo."

""""""Hah?""""""

Endou's words made Kouki and the others leaked those words at the same time. Seeing Endou, they though, "Is this guy's head okay?," and made some gesture with their hands. Thinking, *it can't be helped, huh~*, Endou could only shrugged his shoulders because he was only stating the truth.

"Like I said, he is Nagumo, Nagumo Hajime. The Nagumo who fell from the bridge at that day. He survived in the depth of the dungeon and climbed up with his own power. When coming here, he treated the demonic beasts as if they are just small fries. It's seriously unbelievable!, I thought so, too… but it is the truth."

"Nagumo, eh? You mean Nagumo is alive!?"

Kouki said with a surprised voice. Thus, the others also simultaneously tried to look at the boy with monstrous strength who was advancing the annihilation progress… but as expected they tried to deny it while thinking, "Just how is he Nagumo?"

Endou understood their feelings and with a gesture he said, “Well, it’s true. Although he has completely changed, I’ve seen his status plate,” Endou told them again that the boy was Nagumo Hajime while sporting a dry smile.

Everyone felt it was unbelievable as they vacantly looked at Hajime’s peerlessness, and a person who was awfully flustered said,

“L-Lies. Nagumo is dead. Wasn’t that the case? Everyone also saw it. There’s no way he is alive! We have already agreed on that!”

“Uwah, what’s with you! I have seen his status plate so there’s no mistake it is him.”

“Lies! There’s must be some trick! He must be in disguise and trying to trick us!”

“No, just what are you saying? There’s no reason for him to do that.”

The one who was saying unreasonable things and grabbed Endou’s collar was Hiyama. He was denying Hajime’s survival with an abnormally paled complexion. Kondou and the others around him were somewhat taken aback by Hiyama’s appearance.

The agitated Hiyama was doused by cold water, literally. A large amount of water suddenly appeared above Hiyama and poured down on him like a small waterfall. Hiyama somewhat drowned because it matched the timing when he inhaled. After being doused with water, he had a coughing fit. *What on earth!?* Hiyama was confused only to be told by a cold voice far colder than the cold water.

“… Be quiet. It’s irritating.”

Although Hiyama seemed to getting more agitated and tried to object, he instinctively swallowed his words when he turned his gaze towards the source of the voice. After all, the source of the voice, Yue, was looking at Hiyama with a very cold gaze as though she was looking at an insect. At the same time, not only a few would forget their situation after they were captivated by the ideal girl whose beauty was just like the highest grade bisque doll.

Same could be said for Kouki’s party. Their gazes were naturally attracted to the beautiful looking girl whether they were female or male. Even Suzu was obviously captivated and said, “Whooaa~,” with a strange voice. It wasn’t simply because of her beauty, she was also cladded in a bewitching atmosphere contrary to her young appearance which made Kouki’s party captivated.

And at that time, maybe because of the demon race woman’s instruction, several demonic beasts came to attack Kouki’s party. She probably thought of turning them

into hostages just like how she had used Meld. It was a normal measure since she couldn't even imagine of capturing Hajime with a fair challenge.

Suzu immediately thought of creating shields. Having activated magic one after another, her exhausted body was screaming. She bit her lips to prevent herself from blacking out… but Yue gently stopped Suzu with her hand. Having Yue quietly patting her head, "Ehh?," Suzu inadvertently said with a relaxed voice and stopped her chant.

"… Don't worry."

Yue muttered, and Suzu said, "Ah, it's already safe now," without any basis for it nor any power left her body. Even she herself didn't know why she could simply accepted Yue's words, but she felt she was being defended by a reliable big sister.

Yue looked away from Suzu and glared at the demonic beasts that readied their fangs, claws, tentacles, and maces. Then, with one sentence she pulled her magic's trigger.

""Blue Dragon.""

In the next moment, a bluish-white sphere with one meter in diameter appeared above Yue and the others. Those who used flame attribute magic knew it was one of the highest level magic, a blue flame magic capable of decimating anything it approached, "Blue Imperial." It was abnormal to be able to activate it without any chant and in no time. Especially the rear group; they knew what happened and could only looked up at the blue blaze in blank surprise.

However, this was just the start of what would make them truly surprised. The blue flame burning radiantly suddenly changed its shape to one of a snake, attacked the incoming maces swinging Brutal-look-alikes and the others by swallowing them. They were instantly killed, and not even an ash remained.

Before long, the shape of the blue flame changed and swam in the air. It was a blazing blue dragon, with length of around 30 meters. With Yue in the center, the blue dragon protected Kouki and the others by coiling around them. Then, it raised its head, and opened its jaws towards the demonic beasts which were standing still because they could not approach the the blue hellfire that would perish everything.

RoOoOAAAAR!!!

It roared. And immediately, the bodies of the demonic beasts flew. As though they were attracted by gravity, they jumped into the blue dragon's mouth one after another. Although the others understood it was not suicide since the demonic beasts

desperately tried to escape in mid-air in panic due to the abrupt situation. Seeing the demonic beast throwing their bodies in queue towards the annihilation that didn't even leave an ash, made them think it as nothing but a bad joke.

"What is this magic…"

Someone muttered. The unknown magic had one-sidedly burnt the demonic beasts to annihilation by pulling them, which made Kouki's party unable to close their wide opened mouths. But it couldn't be helped. After all, this magic was the same as "Thunder Dragon," an original magic of Yue's, formed by combining the highest fire magic element, "Blue Imperial," and one of the Age of Gods' magic, gravity magic.

Incidentally, the reason she used "Blue Dragon" and not "Thunder Dragon" was simply because Yue was training herself. Thunder Dragon was a combination between gravity magic and high-ranked wind attribute, thunder, so "Blue Dragon" had higher difficulty and power. Because she was just recently capable of combining highest level magic, she wanted to make its debut.

Naturally, Kouki's party who didn't know of the circumstances shifted their gazes from the "Blue Dragon" to Yue, about to ask for an explanation. However, calmly straightening its back, the Blue Dragon stopped and its flame shone brighter. Together with Yue's sublime figure, it made Kouki's party hold their breath, and they were unable to say the words to ask for an explanation. Several people quickly had their hearts stolen by Yue… especially Suzu; she was letting out an exclamation of joy like a small old man.

On the other side, when the demon race woman saw the bizarre "Blue Dragon" from the distance, she cursed in her mind, *"There's only monsters here, huh!"* Frustrated due to the demonic beasts being exterminated one after another, she changed her aim to the RabbitMan girl beside the mortally wounded Meld, and the two girls close to each other who were separated from the others.

However, the demon race woman was further exposed to the arbitrary.

The Brutal-look-alike which came to attack Shia had its head blown away like a pinball with a swing from Doryukken. She then rotated her body using the momentum from her first attack towards the four-eyed wolf coming advancing from behind her and it died easily with its head crushed by an attack carrying enough centrifugal force.

Once again, Chimeras and black cats were about to attack Kaori and Shizuku. Shizuku gritted her teeth, and readied her broken sword towards the incoming; the scattered demonic beasts filled with killing intent. However, as if to stop them, the cross bits floating in her surrounding came in between Shizuku and the Chimeras.

Shizuku was somewhat shaken by the mysterious crosses were moving as though to protect her. Suddenly, the longer point of the crosses turned towards the Chimera and a roaring sounds rang out. *"Seriously, what are those!?"* Shizuku was shouting inside her mind, when something spinningly flew almost grazing her cheek and fell to the ground with a metallic sound. The same roaring sound rang out beside Kaori, and the same sound of metal resounded, too, as expected.

Although confused, Kaori and Shizuku returned their attentions towards the incoming demonic beasts, and there were only the figures of demonic beasts with heads blown to pieces… They were speechless and turned their gazes towards the source of the metallic sounds and confirmed its identity.

"Isn't that… cartridge?"

"Cartridge… a gun's?"

Kaori and Shizuku faced each other as they said the unfamiliar term out loud. They were convinced once they saw Hajime's figure rampaging with guns in both hand. The crosses floating to defend them were similar to an all-range weapon from somewhere.

"A-Amazing… Hajime-kun can use Funnel."

"Just, since when did he become a NewType…"

Kaori and Shizuku regained a lot of their composure after the surrounding demonic beasts were instantly exterminated. They let out unbecoming retorts which were actually transmitted to Hajime through the Cross Bits. And on the contrary, Hajime wanted to retort back in regards to how the two knew such references. However, Hajime did not worry about it thanks to the skill he honed by being in the company of Yue and the girls, "Let it be".

"Seriously… what's with this."

The demon race woman muttered powerlessly. No matter what she tried, everything was held down and crushed by sheer power. Such irrational things allowed her mind to be invaded by feeling of throwing in the towel. There were hardly any demonic beasts remaining, and it was obvious to anyone who was the victor and loser.

My last hope! The demon race woman fired magic towards Hajime for the sake of escaping and ran towards one of the four exits with all of her might. The magic fired towards Hajime was "Final Prison." It exploded right beside Hajime, and the

petrifying smoke wrapped around him. Kouki's party held their breaths while Kaori and Shizuku screamed Hajime's name.

Leering at the shaken Kouki's party, the demon race woman finally reached one of the exits.

However…

"Haha… I've been checkmated, huh."

"It is certainly as you say."

Before the demon race woman was the floating cross with its dark muzzle pointed at her from inside the passage. With a dry laughter, only now did she realize she had been checkmated long since before she attacked Hajime, and the demon race woman inadvertently leaked a dry laughter. The hateful calm voice came from behind.

This time, the demon race woman looked back in resignation and she saw Hajime walking closer from inside the petrifying smoke as if nothing happened. Next, he scattered the petrifying smoke to the other passage by sweeping it away using the red wave of "Magic Emission."

"… You monster. To take a high-ranked magic as something insignificant… You, are you really human?"

"Actually, even I've doubting that. But, it isn't so bad to become a monster, you know?"

Hajime and the demon race woman said in a joking manner with only a slight distance between them. When the demon race woman took a look at the room, the demonic beasts had truly been annihilated before she was aware of it. Once again she cursed in a small voice, "You monster."

Ignoring her, Hajime aimed Donner's muzzle towards the woman. The weapon of death pointed right before her eyes made the demon race woman realize it was time for her to die, and she looked back.

"Well then, *"Do you have anything left to say?"* Is what is usually said in these kinds of situation… Unfortunately, I don't have any interest in hearing your last will. More importantly, about why a person of the demon race had come here… and where you obtained those demonic beasts… Shall I have you spit it out?"

"Do you think I will speak? It might become an advantage for human race, right? As if I am that stupid."

The demon race woman snorted scornfully, which made Hajime look at her with cold gaze. Thus, without hesitation, he fired Donner to both of the demon race woman's legs.

"AgaaAH!!"

The demon race woman screamed and collapsed. The scream resounded inside the silent room where the demonic beasts had ceased to breathe. Hajime knew the classmates behind him were gulping because of his merciless action. However, not worrying about such things, Hajime asked again with Donner aimed at the woman.

"Whether it's human race or demon race, I don't care about your world's circumstance. I am asking you not as someone from human race. I am only asking because I want to know it. So, answer it now."

"…"

The demon race woman was glaring at Hajime while gritting her teeth from the pain. Seeing her eyes, Hajime realized she was not likely to speak, so he began to speak instead.

"Well, I have roughly guessed it. You came here to conquer the "True Great Dungeon," right?"

The demon race woman's brows twitched from Hajime's words. Hajime continued speaking while carefully observing the woman's reaction.

"Those demonic beasts were the product of an Age of Gods magic… looks like I hit the bull's eye. I see, so the change in demon race side was because they conquered a Great Dungeon and obtained the Age of Gods magic which could enslave demonic beasts, huh… Resultantly, the human race side moved to conquer the Great Dungeon by investigating and then inviting the heroes…"

"How… it can't be…"

Hajime had stated his theories which was right on the mark, and it rattled the demon race woman. With the mortified expression, she questioned how he knew when a possibility came to mind. Seeing her expression, Hajime noticed the demon race woman had guessed Hajime was also another dungeon conqueror. With his glance, he responded, "Correct."

"I see, if you are the same as that person… then I can understand your monster-like power… Ah, isn't that enough? Just kill me. After all, I have no intention of being a captive…"

"As that person… right. You must be referring to the conqueror whom you received the demonic beasts from, huh…"

The expression of the demon race woman's face told him she would rather commit suicide rather than to be taken as a captive. Thus, she wanted to at least die in battle. The information about another dungeon conqueror was enough for Hajime, so with thoughts of ending it, killing intent appeared in his eyes.

As revenge for dying in the middle of her path, and unwillingness to admit defeat, the demon race woman muttered towards Hajime.

"Someday, my lover will kill you."

Her words made Hajime's lips curved and floated a fearless smile.

"I will kill my enemy, even if it is God. And if that person is someone who dances inside the palm of God's, then he wouldn't be able to reach me."

There's nothing left to talk about, so the two closed their mouths. Hajime turned Donner's muzzle towards the demon race woman's head.

However, the moment he was about to pull the trigger, a loud voice stopped him.

"Wait! Just wait, Nagumo! She can no longer fight! So, it's not necessary to kill her!"

"…"

With his finger still on Donner's trigger, "What is this guy saying?," Hajime looked over his shoulder with a dubious expression. Kouki managed to unsteadily stand up after he had slightly recovered and further raised his voice.

"Capture, right, just make her a captive. It's absolutely unforgivable to kill someone who cannot resist. I am the hero. And Nagumo is my comrade, so please back away in consideration of me."

Excuses that rendered too much retort was something Hajime thought there was no value in hearing it and swiftly discarded them. Silently,… he pulled the trigger.

BaAaAaANNNG!

The dry explosive sound echoed inside the room. Killing intent was aimed and a shot was fired through the demon race woman's forehead where she instantly died.

Silence engulfed their surrounding. The classmates finally understood and could only hold their bated breaths, puzzled to the spectacle where one of their classmate

killed a person without hesitation. Amongst all of them, Kaori was most shocked by it.

It was not about him killing a person. After all, Kaori herself had been prepared for it. It was a natural thing since they had entered the fight in this world. After all, fighting the demonic beast inside the dungeon was only combat exercise.

That's why, a day where killing one another would surely come, for she must kill hostile people, and she was prepared to do it. She was a healer who stand by the rear, but thinking of Shizuku, Kouki, and the others who were in the front lines — the time when her the hands of her friends will be dirtied by blood, even if it was just a little, made her heart resolved to not averting from such situations even just for a moment.

What shocked Kaori was because she could not sense any aversion, disgust, and hesitation towards murder from Hajime. He killed a person as though it was natural as breathing. The Hajime Kaori knew was someone who even though he couldn't go against the others, he was a gentle and strong person capable of being able to jump into a whirlpool for the sake of others.

That form of being "strong" was not a power that came from violence. It was a strength due to "thinking about others" no matter what time or situation he was in. That's why, Hajime who could kill an enemy who had lost her spirit and would not resist with neither hesitation nor had any deep emotion, had become someone completely different from Hajime she knew, and it shocked her.

Shizuku was her best friend, so she understood Kaori had received a powerful shock. However, she was able to guess what shocked Kaori from the scattered talk they usually had about Hajime when they were in Japan.

Shizuku looked at Hajime with a cool expression and she thought he had certainly changed, but she knew it was wrong for her, who knew nothing, to complain about it. That's why, as the result, she could do nothing but to stop being nestled close to Kaori.

However, naturally, the lump of justice called hero wouldn't be able to stay silent about it. Kouki's voice rang out as if to subdue the space filled with silence.

"Why, why did you kill her. Was there any necessary to kill her…"

Hajime was walking towards Shia's side and caught Kouki staring at him with a penetrating glare at the edge of his view. He hesitated for a moment thinking how he should answer, but in the next moment, *to begin with, there's no need to answer!*, he thought and decided to ignore Kouki.

However, whether the other party would allow Hajime's attitude was another problem…

Chapter 9 : The This and That After the Reunion

While the sound of Kouki's desperate voice subduing the silence, the person whom the words were directed to pretended as though he didn't hear anything and walked towards Shia's side, beside the collapsed Meld.

Thinking there was no longer a need to protect Kouki's party, Yue also walked towards Hajime and Shia. "Ahh, One-sama!," Suzu's shout, whose heart was just like a small old man, came from behind her.

"Shia, how's Meld's condition?"

"It was almost too late. He would not survive if we were even a little slower… I used "Holy Water" as instructed, but… was it really okay to do that?"

"Ah, I was indebted to this person. Besides, the hole Meld left would be too big in a lot of ways. It'll be especially problematic if someone weird took over the training of the Hero's party. Well, seeing their current state, it looks like Meld was unable to finish their training properly… but it isn't a mistake that he is a man of character. He is a person who will cause regret in various meanings if he died."

Kouki was currently glaring at Hajime. Supported by Ryuutarou, he walked towards Hajime accompanied by the other classmates. Shia was asking him for the reason of using Holy Water on Meld. Incidentally, what he meant by "someone weird" was the person from Church of the Saints such as Ishtal.

"… Hajime."

"Yue. Thank you for listening to my request."

"Nh."

Yue had arrived at the time he was still speaking to Shia. While gently patting Yue's cheek who was looking up at him as she called his name, Hajime conveyed his gratitude. Yue's gaze expressed, "Don't mind," while delightedly narrowing her eyes. Naturally, Hajime's gaze softened and the two were watching each other.

"… You two, please read the mood… Come on, return to your senses! Everyone are almost gathered here!"

Hajime and Yue began to create their own world which could already be called a disease for them. Thus, Shia clapped her hands and retorted to make them return to their senses.

Apparently, the glares coming from Kouki with different meaning had increased and Hajime noticed it. Especially a glare coming from different direction than Kouki and the others. It made him feel a chill running down on his spine.

"Oi, Nagumo. Why did you kill—…"

"Hajime-kun… even though there's much I want to ask, how's Meld-san's condition? From what I see, the injuries had been closed and his breathing is also steady. But, he should've been mortally wounded…"

Kouki's words to press a question onto Hajime was interrupted by Kaori, who came and knelt by Meld's side with a serious expression and asked Hajime the details of Meld's condition.

For a moment, Hajime felt the chill in his guts from Kaori's gaze, but thinking it was just his imagination, he decided to answer Kaori's question.

"Yeah, that's because… I used a rather special medicine. The liquid type that will instantly heal a person completely even if the person was dying."

"S-Such a medicine, how come I've never heard of it?"

"That is because it was once only a legend… and no one would be able to obtain it, normally. That's why, Yaegashi, you need to be healed by magic. And here is the potion to recover magic power."

"Eh, yes… Thank you."

Being called by Hajime, Shizuku received the potion and slightly stammered while she said her gratitude due to the gap between the current Hajime and the Hajime in her memory. Hajime didn't especially mind Shizuku's reaction and he gave another magic power recovery potion to Kaori. Kaori caught the potion bottle and drunk the content after she said her gratitude to Hajime. With the Lipovitan-like taste spreading inside her mouth, her energy gradually recovered. The classmates should be immediately healed as long as Kaori recovers.

For now, Kaori and the others breathed sighs of relief because they understood there was nothing to worry about in regards to Meld. Then, Kouki once again opened his mouth.

"Oi, Nagumo, I am grateful about Meld-san's matter, but why did y—…"

"Hajime-kun. Thank you for saving Meld-san. Also, thank you… for saving us."

Thus, he was once again interrupted by Kaori. Kouki now wore a truly subtle expression. However, Kaori completely not noticing Kouki's expression since she was looking straight at Hajime. Even though she received a severe shock from Hajime's changes, there were things she wanted to say. She walked up until she was right before Hajime to say her gratitude about Meld's matter and how he saved them.

Afterwards, while grasping her skirt with both hands, *guh*, the things she wanted to say were on the tip of her tongue, but she couldn't say anything and her tears began to fall. Although she was sobbing, she didn't look away from Hajime as though to confirm the him before her was not an illusion. Hajime silently returned Kaori's gaze.

"Hajime-gun… dank God, gusuh, dat you'r alive. Dat time, I am sorry… hic… dat I couldn't protect you… waaa."

Amongst the classmates, the girls held warm gazes because they could guess Kaori's feelings. Some of the boys also had warm gazes, but Kondou and some others had bitter expressions, while Kouki and Ryuutarou were dumbfounded since they could not understand Kaori. The most dense protagonist on earth, Kouki, and the muscle for a brain, Ryuutarou, made it hard for Shizuku and it could be seen in her eyes.

With troubled expression, Shia said, "Uh, by any chance, is she a new rival?," while Yue was looking at Kaori with the usual silent and expressionlessness.

The Kaori before him was crying which messed her face, and Hajime wore an indescribable expression when he realized Kaori had been worrying about him since the day he fell just as Endou had said.

The truth was, he had told Yue once about his circumstance along with the story about Kaori, but that was when they were still in the abyss, and he had completely forgotten about Kaori until he met Aiko and the others in Ul. That's why, he was gradually feeling guilty because she thought of him this strongly.

After sporting a troubled and at lost expression, Hajime answered Kaori's words with a bitter smile.

"…What to say, looks like I've made you worried. I am sorry for not immediately telling you about it. Well, just as you see, I am alive… so there's no need to apologize… Also, umm, please don't cry."

Hajime said while looking at Kaori with the same gentle gaze when he was worrying about Kaori and said, "Please protect me." Upon seeing his gaze, Kaori felt her chest being filled with the memory of the night when they exchanged the promise. Inadvertently, *Waahh*, she cried and jumped into Hajime's chest.

At a loss of what to do about Kaori who was crying while clinging on his chest, Hajime held up both of his hands. If it was another classmate, he would have mercilessly threw the person away since he would feel irritated and use yakuza kick to make the person unconscious. However, the pure and never changing goodwill which was the same even before he fell into the abyss made him incapable of treating her coldly.

But with Yue by his side, he couldn't embrace another woman and could only hold up his hands as though someone had pointed gun's muzzle at him, becoming a half assed respond since he just let Kaori cry. It was truly not Hajime-like.

"My best friend is crying! So, hug her!," was what Shizuku's gaze who was beside him was saying, but it was hard to move because Yue was also watching him in silence. Being helpless, he lightly pat Kaori's head to stop her after a while. Really, Hajime had became a good for nothing.

"…Fuu, Kaori is really gentle. She even cry in joy from her classmate's survival… However, Nagumo killed a non-resisting person. We need to talk. That's why, that's enough and you should get away from Nagumo."

"You, read the mood!," was what some of the classmates criticized Kouki with their gazes. Even in such time, this boy was still unable to be considerate to Kaori's feeling. While glaring at Hajime mixed with condemn, he tried to pull Kaori away from Hajime. Maybe it was simply because he didn't want others to touch Kaori or because the caution he held from being beside a murderer… or maybe both.

"Wait, Kouki! Isn't Nagumo-kun the one who saved us? How can you said such things?"

"But, Shizuku. That woman already lost her spirit to fight. There's no need to kill her. So what Nagumo did is something I can't allow."

"See here, Kouki, can you cut it out already? To begin with…"

Kouki's objection was rebutted by Shizuku. The other classmates were flustered since they didn't know what to do, but Hiyama's gang who never liked Hajime began to support Kouki.

Gradually, it became a discussion about Hajime's action. Kaori had already separated from Hajime's chest and wiped her tears, but there was still the shock she received from a while ago, so she fell silent with a difficult expression while she was thinking of something.

Suddenly, a voice came to douse them with cold water.

"…What foolish people. Hajime, can we leave now?"

"Ah~, yup, let's go."

The one calling Kouki and the others "foolish" with tone so cold as if it was in absolute zero was Yue. Although the voice was spoken in small mutter, it clearly resounded even inside the commotion of Kouki and the others. For a moment, silence wrapped their location, then Kouki and the others moved their gazes towards Yue.

To begin with, the reason Hajime came here after hearing Endou's story was his obligation to Kaori, and it had been accomplished. Thus, he went out of the room following Yue who pulled his hand. Shia followed after them without minding the others.

As such, the action of Hajime's party made Kouki and the others stop.

"Please stop. Our talk here isn't over yet. I won't take Nagumo as my comrade if he doesn't tell me his real intention. Besides, just who do you think you are? Although I am grateful for your help, to call us foolish at our first meeting… isn't that rude? Just what is foolish about us?"

"…"

Kouki once again talk about something out of topic. Although what he said was correct in such situations, comparing their circumstances made Yue wanted to say, "Try to think while putting your hand on your chest." To even go this far, it wouldn't be strange to say Kouki was cursed by something.

Maybe because Yue had forsaken Kouki already; she didn't look at him, expressing there's no value in looking at him. Kouki was slightly irritated and frowned being of Yue's attitude, but he immediately floated a gentle smile again, thinking she was just an ordinary girl, and he tried to talk to Yue.

Because this wouldn't end with the way it was going and he felt Yue's discomfort, Hajime decided to answer a little and sighed with an expression as though saying it was a hassle.

"Amanogawa. I have neither care nor obligation to answer everything to you whose existence is a joke in more ways than one. But, I'll point it out to you a little because you are being persistent about it."

"Point it out, you say? Are you saying I am wrong? I, I only say something obvious as a person."

Because, *It's troublesome, truly!*, was what Hajime expression turned to. Kouki irritatedly objected Hajime's words which was then ignored, and Hajime continued his words.

"You can't fool me."

"What's with that…"

"You, you are not angry because I killed that woman. You are only feeling unpleasant to see a person's death. However, you knew you are mistaken to blame me to kill the woman who murdered the Knights and tried to kill you. That's why you're using "killing a non-resisting person" as your main point, right? Being made to see something you didn't want to see and for someone to easily do things you couldn't… those are the cause of your anger. However, you tried to cover it under the name of justice. What worse is you yourself aren't conscious of it. You never change, huh. You interpret things at your own convenience as natural as breathing."

"Y-You are wrong! Don't say something for your own convenience! It is the true you killed a non-resisting person!"

"I killed my enemy, what's wrong with that?"

"Wh-!? What are you saying? It's murder! Of course it is wrong!"

"Haa, I don't want to discuss with you, so can we end it now? ――― I, I won't give any mercy to my enemy. If someone opposed me, as long as I don't have any other need for it, I will absolutely kill that person. I don't care whether they are good or evil, resisting or not. Hatefully, I knew I'd be dead if I show even a moment of weakness. This is my sense of value cultivated inside the abyss, and I won't force it to other. But, if someone doesn't like it and tried to block me…"

Hajime instantly closed the distance and pressed the muzzle against Kouki's forehead. At the same time, Hajime's "Pressure" activated and the dense killing

intent fell into the surrounding like a large, powerful waterfall. Kouki's party held their breaths. Even Kouki, who was able to chase after Shizuku whose movement was the fastest among his comrades, could not even perceive Hajime's earlier movement and he trembled in fear.

"I will kill them, even if that person is a former classmate of mine."

"Y-You…"

"Don't misunderstand, okay? I never thought of returning to you. Also, I am not your comrade. I only came here to pay my obligation to Shirasaki. It's a goodbye after we get out of here. I have my own path to take."

After saying so, he glared at Kouki who couldn't say anything and was holding his breath. Hajime returned Donner to its holster, and with "Pressure" deactivation, the classmates exhaled greatly while looking at Hajime with complexed gazes. However, Kouki still could not accept it and tried to argue some more. But it was prevented by Yue's harsh words while she wore a disgusted expression.

"…The one who fought was Hajime. The loser who ran away after being defeated in fear has no qualification to criticize him."

"Wh—, you say I ran away…"

Actually it was not a coincidence Hajime's party could pinpointed their location. The truth was, Hajime guessed the explosive torrent of magic power he felt to be coming from Kouki's party when he was still in upper floor. Then, he used full advantage of his perception type skills to search for people presences downstairs and used transmutation along with pile bunker to pierce through the floors.

The torrent of magic power he felt at that time was Kouki's "Supreme Break." Feeling the huge power, Hajime's party understood that Kouki would be able to defeat the demon race woman in that condition. That's why they could see through that Kouki hesitated to kill and invited their predicament after coming to their location. It was why Yue said, "he ran away after being defeated in fear."

Kouki tried to refute Yue, but a deep voice interrupted him.

"Stop it, Kouki."

"Meld-san!"

Meld's consciousness had returned a while ago and he heard the conversation between Kouki and the others. Still somewhat in a daze, he stood up and shook his

head to clear his mind. Next, he saw his abdomen which surely had been injured, and so he tilt his head in confusion.

Kaori explained to Meld in details about what had happened. Knowing he was miraculously helped with a valuable medicine and hearing the owner was Hajime, Meld was happy from the depth of his heart that Hajime was alive. Moreover, he thanked Hajime for saving him. He grandly prostrated for being unable to save him at that time which made Hajime felt uncomfortable to receive his apology.

Rather than not minding it, Hajime had completely forgotten when Meld said, "I will absolutely save you," … but he read the mood when Meld was before him, apologizing while bowing deeply.

When his conversation with Hajime ended, Meld turned towards Kouki and apologized just like what he did to Hajime.

"M-Meld-san? Why, why are you apologizing?"

"Of course. I am your trainer… but, I forgot to teach you an important thing during a fight. It's the resolution to kill a person. When the time comes, I've thought of making you experience killing people by setting them up as thieves while making it look like a coincidence… After all, that experience is something necessary if you participate in war against the demon race… However, I've spent a lot of time conversing with you which made me think if it was really okay to let you experience that… Thus, I've hesitated. If I am thinking of my position as the commander of the Knights, I would have taught you even earlier, but… a little longer, just a little longer, until we cleared this. Things dragged on in this manner and reached this situation… I am just being half-assed. It's my mistake as your trainer. That's why, to make you face death… I apologize."

Saying so, Meld once again bowed which made the classmates try and comfort him in hurry. Apparently, Meld had been considerably worried about Kouki's party. He was likely being pulled apart by his mission as the commander and him as a person.

Meld is a citizen of the Kingdom and a believer of Church of the Saints. Therefore, it wasn't weird that he felt it was natural and an honor for Kouki and the others, the "God's Apostles," to fight the demon race. However, he doubted as he fought along with Kouki's party which meant he was a good or maybe a gentle person, and at the level of a man of character just as Hajime said.

Hearing what was in Meld's mind, Kouki fell silent. After knowing that he must kill people in due time, he recalled his fear when he was about to kill the demon race woman. At the same time, he received shock from Meld's words saying they would

kill people masked as thieves for the sake of training. *If it's thieves, then we have power to overwhelm them. But to purposely killed them…* he thought.

On the other side, Kaori was also silent. But it was not because she heard Meld's words. For a long time, she had been thinking about Hajime's words.

The sense of value cultivated inside the abyss where enemy would be killed without hesitation even if it was his classmate… were impossible words coming from Hajime of the past. However, he proved he was serious with the previous killing intent. The Hajime who was gentle and acted by putting the sake of others before him had unhesitatingly turned his killing intent towards them. Kaori was perplexed and shaken by the differences between Hajime she knew and Hajime before her. Thinking of the Hajime who was worried about her from a little ago was an illusion, Kaori was uneasy.

While she was thinking, Kaori suddenly felt someone's gaze. Before Kaori was the blond-haired, red-eyed beautiful girl. A beautiful girl that made even Kaori instinctively charmed. She was quietly observing Kaori with eyes where no feeling could be felt.

Kaori recalled the girl had been fairly intimate with Hajime which made Kaori interested and turned to look at Yue. For a while, the two watched each other.

"…Fu."

"Kh…"

However, Yue was the first to avert her gaze while sneering.

Kaori inadvertently held her breath. It was because she noticed the meaning behind her sneer. It was, "If you are shaken by this, just forget about Hajime," something like that.

Yue had of course guessed how Kaori feels about Hajime from her attitude. Thus, hearing she believed of Hajime's survival even though he fell into the abyss, *a strong rival in love might show up, I must stand tall!*, was what she thought.

However, when she saw Kaori comparing the past and current Hajime, and it resulted in her being shaken and perplexed while being taken aback by the differences. Although that reaction was as natural as possible for a person… it made Yue see her as insignificant.

You can't even become an enemy. From now on, Hajime is only mine. Hajime's "special" person is me! The implied declaration made Kaori's face red; red from shame and

anger. However, Kaori could not refute since she had lost sight of the human called Hajime. The first encounter between Yue and Kaori resulted in Yue as the victor.

Leering at Kouki and the others whose mood became subtle, Hajime took Yue and Shia along, collected the pile bunker's stake, and tried to go through the opened hole. Noticing what he was doing, Kouki and the others began to follow Hajime's party. Endou had proposed for everyone to take advantage of Hajime's party until they reached the surface, and Meld was being carried by Hajime after they pleaded him.

On the way to the surface, the demonic beasts that tried to obstruct them were instantly killed by Hajime which made them once again amazed by his strength. The classmates wore various expressions thinking whether he was the same person who was once called "incompetent."

Hiyama was glaring at Hajime with paled complexion, Kondou's gang were sending him begrudging gazes, and Nagayama's party were looking at him admiringly as they wore complex expressions due to Hajime clearly saying he was not their comrade.

Even though Kondou's gang had closely seen Hajime's prowess and shrunk before it, they still thought Hajime was the same as the previous him. On the other side, Nagayama's party knew what kind of treatment Hajime received from Hiyama and his gang and pretend to not see it, so now they felt guilty about it. They thought it could not be helped that Hajime didn't think of them as his comrades…

Receiving various gazes from Kouki and the others behind him, Hajime just ignored them and advanced on his own road.

On the way, Suzu's inner oldman caused commotion as she tried to talk to Yue about various things. She also barraged Hajime with questions about what happened, then she turned her aim towards Shia's huge breasts and rabbit-ears. When she realized the two just ignored her, she was then physically stopped by Shizuku. Kondou's gang tried to talk to Yue and Shia fully loaded with desire, but were completely ignored, even so they kept being persistent. They tried to touch Shia's rabbit-ears without permission which awarded them with Hajime's rubber bullets. They vomited after receiving yakuza kicks, and fear was driven into them when they received a slight killing intent leaking from Hajime ———— various things happened, and finally the group reached the surface.

Kaori was still looking down, worrying. Shizuku was also worriedly watching Kaori and drew closer to her. However, a situation where an impact blew away all of Kaori's worries had happened. It was a situation she couldn't overlook as a woman whose heart was set on Hajime.

It happened when they arrived at the entrance of «Orcus Great Dungeon».

"Ah! Papaa~!"

"Uh! Myuu, huh."

It was the appearance of a little girl calling Hajime papa.

Chapter 10 : Declaration of War

"Papaa~!! Welcome back~!!"

A cheerful little girl's voice rang out inside the plaza of «Orcus Great Dungeon»'s entrance gate.

Adventurers and mercenaries, who were going to dive into the dungeon, were noisily negotiating with the merchants who were also advertising themselves in various crowded stalls. However, Myuu's raised voice, which rivaled their own, made the experts of battle look at her and smile as their gazes softened.

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap—! Myuu ran straight towards Hajime while making such lovely footsteps, and then jumped into Hajime. Hajime failed to receive her since he hadn't even dreamed she would do that.

In a normal situation, the little girl's head would have thrust into his stomach like a rocket and made him writhe in pain. But fortunately, Hajime's body was not that weak. Moreover, he completely warded off the impact so he would not injure Myuu, and firmly caught her.

"Myuu, you came to welcome us? Where's Tio?"

"Un. Tio-oneechan thought it was about time for Papa to come back. That's why we came here. Tio-oneechan is…"

"This one is here."

Separating the crowd, a beautiful, black-haired, golden-eyed, young woman appeared. Needless to say, it was Tio. Since she was within the crowd where it wasn't odd for one to get lost made, Hajime began to complain about her being separated from Myuu.

"Oi oi, Tio. Don't separate from Myuu in such a place."

"This one kept her along her sight. It just that there were some rude fellows. And this one doth not want to let Myuu see a ghastly spectacle."

"I see. Then it couldn't be helped… So, where are the suicide candidates?"

"Well, Master. This one has completely settled it down."

"… Tch, well whatever."

"… Doth Master truly believe thee will return her again?"

Apparently, there were some idiots who tried to kidnap Myuu. Because Myuu was a child from the Sea-dweller tribe, she put on a hood so she wouldn't stand out in such a public location. As such, not knowing she was a child from Sea-dweller tribe protected by the Kingdom, there were people thinking of insolence. One of the reasons might be because under the hood, she had the face of a young child with lovely features. It was unknown whether their objective was ransom or not though.

Hajime asked for the criminals' whereabout with a dark smile and the obviousness that he'd kill them, made Tio admonish him in half-amazement. In the beginning, Hajime disliked being called Papa from the bottom of his heart, but now he had become her Papa. *When we arrive at Elisen, can Master separate from her…* Hajime was more worrisome than Myuu.

Hearing the conversation between Hajime and Tio, Kouki's party stood in blank surprise. Though they understood Hajime had become strong in the past four months because he experienced various things they couldn't even imagine, "How can he be a father!" Everyone was dumbfounded by this thought. The male students thought, "Just what kind of experiences has he piled up!?" and they moved their gazes to Yue and Shia, and next they looked at the black-haired, big-breasted, beautiful woman who suddenly appeared, and they clearly thought of something rude. This surprise might even be greater than the time Hajime displayed his peerlessness inside the dungeon.

If they calmly thought about it, it's unbelievable for him to make a child after being missing for just four months, but the various impacts in succession, along with them just returning from life and death battle made them lost their composure and splendidly make such a misunderstanding.

Following that, one person unsteadily moved within Kouki's party. With a smile plastered on her face which didn't reach the eyes… it was Kaori. Kaori unsteadily approached him and suddenly, *glare*, her eyes opened wide then she caught Hajime.

"Hajime-kun! What does this mean!? Is she really Hajime-kun's daughter!? Who's the mother!? Yue-san!? Shia-san!? Or, is it that black-haired person!? Don't tell me, there are others!? Just how many did you make pregnant!? Answer me! Hajime-kun!"

Gripping Hajime's collar, Kaori shook Hajime in confusion. Although Hajime tried to say it was a misunderstanding and get away from her, he couldn't get away because Kaori gripped him with such ridiculous strength he had no idea she had. From behind Kaori, "Kaori, please calm down! There's no way she is his daughter, you know!" Shizuku admonished and pinioned her, but it seemed like Kaori did not hear her.

On the other hand, they could hear whispers and rumours coming from the surroundings.

"What's this? A scene of carnage?"

"It looks like, he got another woman pregnant while he has another woman?"

"And not only one or two."

"Doesn't it seem like he got five pregnant at the same time?"

"Well, I heard he created a harem and made tens of women pregnant, I think?"

"But, he seemed to have hidden it from the wife."

"I see… so today he got found out huh."

"To create a harem… how enviable."

"What an honorable man… he is better off dead though."

Apparently, it turned out that Hajime was a married brute who hid the fact that he was the master of a harem and made tens of women pregnant while keeping it a secret from his wife. Hajime, who was currently being shaken by Kaori, was looking at the ceiling with half-closed eyes, and then he leaked a deep sigh while patting Myuu, who wondered what happened and tilted her head.

* * *

The appearance of Kaori, whose head was buried in Shizuku's chest with a crimson face, looked as though she wanted to bury herself in a hole. Regaining her composure, she noticed she had shouted something unbelievable, and her embarrassment came in at mach-speed. "It's okay~, it's okay," the appearance of Shizuku comforting her was just like a mother… no, let's stop here.

Hajime and the others had moved away from the entrance gate and arrived at the plaza in the town's entrance. After his honor, which had gone up made a sharp fall in the public eyes, he reported to the branch head, Lorr, about the accomplishment of the request. And after two or three conversations, he decided to leave the town quickly to escape the various commotions. To begin with, he had only come here to deliver the letter from Ilwa to Lorr, so there was neither a need to resupply nor problem if they left immediately.

Kouki's party came back one by one after the leaving Hajime's party due to following Kaori. Kaori, still writhing in embarrassment, was desperately thinking about what she should do. She had to decide whether she would separate from Hajime as she was or follow him. Her feelings were more inclined to follow him. She didn't want to separate after they were finally reunited.

However, she could not make a clear decision because of her her guilt from leaving Kouki's party and how she was shaken by Hajime's changes. Moreover, there was the effect from her shaking being seen through and sneered at.

Kaori, just like what Yue did to her, had guessed how strong Yue's feelings were towards Hajime. Following that, more than anything, how Hajime thought of Yue as someone important to him became a thorn that pierced and stuck onto her heart. The two thought of each other. Then, the one-sidedly ridicule, "So that's the extent of your feelings" doubted the strength of Kaori's shaken feelings.

She was wondering whether her feelings would lose to Yue's, and now, whether her feelings should be set aside so it would not become a nuisance. But more importantly, was she really looking at the current Hajime beside her? Or was she only thinking of the past Hajime? That, coupled with Yue's extraordinarily high abilities as his partner and how dignified she was made Kaori… overwhelmed. In short, she had lost her confidence in herself as a woman, as a magic-user, and even her feelings towards Hajime.

Finally, it was the time for Hajime's party to leave, and for some reason the atmosphere was full of unrest. Noticing that and raising her face, Kaori saw around ten of men blocking their way.

"Oi oi, just where do you think you are going? You made our comrades into such rag-tags, do you think you can go without an apology? Ah? Ah!?"

The dirty looking armed man smiled inappropriately as he looked at Tio and said. Apparently, they were the comrades of the fellows who previously tried to kidnap Myuu. They came to take revenge on Tio. But, those vulgar gazes were obviously not looking for retribution but something else.

In this town, adventurers should know of the commotion inside the guild and would not go looking for a fight against Hajime. That's why, these men were probably stray mercenaries.

Hajime and some others were gritting their teeth while being amazed at the template-like situation coming from these scum. However, mistaking that as shaking in fear, the failed excuses for mercenaries began to get carried away.

Their gazes moved towards Yue and Shia, too. The gazes that seemed to licking them made Yue and Shia feel disturbed from the bottom of their hearts and hid behind Hajime. Misunderstanding their actions as being frightened, they began to threaten Hajime who was surrounded by Yue and the girls.

"BRAT! You understand right? Leave the women and quickly disappear if you don't want to die! Whaa~t, I'll return them if you properly apologize!"

"Well, they'll already be broken by that time though."

Thinking it was amusing, *GYAHAHA—*, the men laughed. One of them was even lusting after the frightened Myuu, while another was lusting after the Rabbitman, a race usually used as an outlet for human sexual desire. And their fate had been decided now.

Just like the usual, the pressure came attacked the mercenary-like men like a giant waterfall that even made creaks in the air. However, being enraged and could not endure the men's speeches, Kouki moved out only to get wrapped inside the pressure and trembled. Then, he saw Hajime, not caring about him, walked towards the men from the corner of his view.

Though it was too late, the men tried to apologize because they noticed they had picked a fight against someone they must not. But, on all-fours due from the pressure, they could not even open their mouths, so they could not apologize.

Hajime also didn't want to hear their words anymore. There was already enough reason for Hajime to become mad because they were thinking of making Shia an outlet for their lust, but their malice also had frightened Myuu, so that led to a decision of making them live a life more painful than death.

Hajime loosened the pressure a little and lined up the men who were on their knees, then he unhesitatingly and devilishly shot the symbol of a man starting from the one at the edge. Furthermore, one by one the screaming, groin-holding men were kicked away and piled up in the corner of the plaza with their smashed pelvises. With this, they wouldn't be able to make child or even walk. It was up to each person whether they'd work hard in the future to stay alive or not.

The overly excessive and merciless counterattack made Kouki's party back away. The male students were especially affected and turned pale as they covered their nether regions.

Leering at Kouki's party, Hajime returned to where Yue and the girls were.

"Once again, a merciless one, huh~. As expected of Master. Even though those art women's enemy, doesth not a little sympathy spring up?"

"Usually Hajime-san would not be angry right~. As expected, is it because of Myuu-chan? Looks like the overprotectiveness keeps rising."

"… Nh, though there's that… Hajime was also angry for Shia."

"Eh!? Angry for my sake? Ehehe, Hajime-san… thank you very much~."

"… Yue can immediately seen through me."

"Nh… of course. It is because I am always looking at Hajime."

"Yue…"

"Hajime…"

In the end, Hajime and Yue began to create their own world, which Shia retorted, then Myuu jumped to Hajime to be spoiled, and lastly Tio let out perverted remarks that ended in her panting from Hajime's coldness. These spectacles were connected with Hajime as the core.

Kaori was silently watching Hajime who carried Myuu while being surrounded by Yue and the girls. With the previous spectacle, she understood that Hajime would not hesitate to use violence. It was something vastly different compared to the previous Hajime, and just by seeing it, it became a denial of Hajime's kindness.

However, she wondered about the reason for Hajime's anger, which made him resort to violence. It was for the sake of the girls that were close to him, so they could enjoy themselves and laugh happily. *Really, just how can a person who lost his kindness be surrounded by such smiles. Just how can such a young child yearn for him as a father.*

Following that, the disturbance in her mind due to Hajime's changes had dissipated. To begin with, Hajime had returned to the dungeon for the sake of relieving Kaori by informing her his survival. And just like his words, he had returned to the dungeon only for Kaori, but he didn't cast the others away. He saved Meld who received mortal wounds and told his companion to protect Kouki's party.

Kaori noticed it. The reason Hajime unhesitatingly displayed such violence and mercilessness towards his enemy was for the sake of protecting his important people. Of course Kaori herself might also be included inside, but it was a fact that Hajime was thinking for the others' sake. The proof was the smiles from the girls surrounding Hajime.

Kaori guessed it. Hajime had lost his hair color, right eye and left arm, surely because of the severe environment he had lived through. He certainly almost broken down mentally and physically many times. No, it was possible… it was possible that he had already broken which resulted in his changes. Even so, Hajime walked on his path surrounded by those smiles.

That fact made the fog inside Kaori's mind disperse. She could hear the sound of puzzle pieces being rightfully placed. *Just what I was hesitating about.* There's "Hajime" before her. There's the boy that her heart always thought of. The one who was called "incompetent," but crawled from the abyss, gained enormous power, and came to save her.

There were parts that had changed, but there was also unchanged parts. However, that's something natural. After all, people would always change with time, experiences, and meetings. That's why, there was no need for her to feel fear. There's no need for her to lose her confidence. There's no need for her to back away from him.

If there's something I don't know, then it'll okay if I come to know it while being by his side. Up until now, just like the time we were inside the class. There's no way the strength of my feelings will lose! There's nothing wrong with me joining the circle that surrounds Hajime! I won't let anyone laugh at my feelings anymore!

Resolution and determination were born inside Kaori's eyes. Shizuku, by her side, was smiling at her best friend's change. Following that, she silently pushed Kaori's back. Kaori , with eyes radiating more "strength" than before, nodded to thank Shizuku and moved towards her next battlefield. That's right, toward her fight as a woman!

Hajime's party noticed that Kaori was walking towards them. Hajime thought she came to see them off, while Yue by his side, "Muh?," became wary as she frowned. "Arara?," Shia was looking at Kaori as her interest deepened, and Tio murmured, "Looks like it'll be a bloodbath huh~." Because she was apparently not coming to see them off, Hajime was looking at Kaori, frowning due at the ominous feeling.

"Hajime-kun, can I come with you, too? … No, that's not it, I will absolutely come with you, so please take care of me, okay?"

"… Hah?"

From the first words spoken, with neither preface nor wish-washing, it became a development where everything was decided and made Hajime's eyes turn into dots. Inadvertently, he leaked such a stupefied voice. In place of Hajime, who could not immediately regain his composure due to being dumbfounded, Yue moved out.

"… You are not qualified for that."

"What qualification? Is it to always think of Hajime? Then, I won't lose to anyone, you know?"

Kaori calmly replied Yue's words. Yue, "Mmhmp," made her mouth into ^.

Kaori matched her gaze to Yue's, then she abruptly moved her unshakable gaze towards Hajime. Following that, she united her hand before her chest with blushing cheeks, took a deep breath, then with desperate and trembling voice, she spoke to him… thus she conveyed it.

"I love you."

"… Shirasaki."

Kaori's expression was mix of embarrassment, worrying while she was expecting Hajime's answer, and happiness coming from being able to convey her feelings to him. Thus, with those mixed feeling, she didn't back away, displaying her determination.

That gaze, filled with determination and sincerity made Hajime answered her with serious eyes.

"I have a woman I am in love with. So I can't answer Shirasaki's feelings. Therefore, I can't take you with me."

Hajime's clear answer made Kaori immediately bite her lip as if she wanted to cry, but in the next moment, power was born inside the eyes that were about to spill tears and she raised her face. Thus she nodded to tell him she understood. Behind Kaori, Kouki and the others were in blank surprise, agape, and in a pandemonium-like situation, but not minding them, Kaori spun her desired words.

"… Un, I know. It's Yue-san, right?"

"Yeah, that's why…"

"But, I don't think that can be a reason for me not to be at Hajime-kun's side."

"What?"

"Because, Shia-san and the slightly strange Tio-san are also in love with Hajime-kun, right? Especially Shia-san, I feel she is pretty serious about it."

"… That's…"

"Even though Hajime-kun, with you already having your own special person, she still doesn't give up and wants to be at Hajime-kun's side, and also, Hajime-kun lets her be so. That's why, it wouldn't be a problem if I am there too, right? After all, my feelings for Hajime-kun… won't lose to anyone."

Saying so, Kaori turned her blazing, strong gaze towards Yue. What was expressed was, *My feelings won't lose to you! I won't let you laugh at them!*, and Yue could see Kaori's strong will. That was definitely a declaration of war. It was a declaration that she'd steal the one and only "special seat" from Yue.

Receiving Kaori's piercing gaze from the front, Yue, unusually, turned her lips in a smile that could be understood by anyone as fearless.

"… I see, then come with us. And there I will teach you. Our differences, that is."

"Not you, it's Kaori."

"… Then, just call me Yue. I accept Kaori's challange."

"Fufu, Yue. Don't cry if you lose, kay?"

"… Fu, fufufufufu."

"Aha, ahahahahaha."

Yue and Kaori created a world of their own with a different meaning than the time Yue did it with Hajime. Even though Hajime was the one confessed to, he was being put aside before he was aware of it, and, in such a manner, in the end it was decided Kaori would enter his party making Hajime look into the far distance. Seeing Yue and Kaori who were laughing together, Shia and Myuu by his side were hugging him, trembling.

"Ha-Hajime-san! Is something wrong with my eyes? I can see dark clouds and draconic lightning behind Yue-san!"

"… Isn't that normal? Even I can see a katana holding Hanya behind Shirasaki."

"Papaa~! Those Onee-chan are scaryy."

“Haa haa, thee are somehow… if you turn your gazes to this one… ngh, can’t hold it.”

With Satan? appearing behind each of them, Yue and Kaori laughed with daunting pose. *Were you those kinds of characters?*, Hajime wanted to retort with that, but he decided to wait for them to stop while soothing Myuu, who was clinging to him, because those words would become a boomerang back at him. He is now the so called good-for-nothing.

But, there was someone who objected towards Kaori’s will… and of course it was the “Hero”, Amanokawa Kouki.

“Wa-Wait! Please wait a sec! I don’t understand this. Kaori likes Nagumo? She wants to follow him? Eh? What does this mean? How, how did it suddenly come to this? Nagumo! You, just what have you done to Kaori.”

“… the heck is with this one.”

Apparently, Kouki could not admit the reality of Kaori falling for Hajime. It was not something that came out of the blue as Kouki was the only one who didn’t notice it, but in Kouki’s eyes, he only saw it as Kaori suddenly doing something strange and the cause being Hajime. Really, Kouki’s mind that only saw things in the way that would be convenient for him made Hajime retort instinctively.

Being completely convinced that Hajime did something to Kaori, Kouki indignantly moved with partly drawn Holy Sword in hand which made Shizuku admonish him, with a gesture was as though she was enduring a headache.

“Kouki. Can’t you see Nagumo-kun didn’t do anything? Please think about it calmly. Though it looks like you didn’t notice it, Kaori has thought of him in that way since long ago. I mean, since the time we were still in Japan. Just try to think about what Kaori always talked about.”

“Shizuku… what are you saying… that’s, that’s because Kaori is kind, so she feels sorry for Hajime who was always alone, right? There’s neither connection nor motive, so there’s no way Kaori would like an otaku like Hajime.”

Hearing Kouki and Shizuku’s conversation, Hajime unexpectedly became agitated as that was said straight to his face, his cheek twitching.

Noticing the commotion from Kouki and the others, Kaori spoke towards Kouki and the classmates behind him to make herself clear.

“Kouki-kun, everyone, I am sorry. I know it is selfish of me… but I, I want to go with Hajime-kun by any means. That’s why, I will leave your party. Truly, I am sorry.”

Kaori said so as she bowed deeply, making Suzu, Eri, Ayako, and Mao, the female circle, yell *Kyaa— Kyaa—*. Nagayama, Endou, and Nomura, the three who had guessed Kaori's feelings were waving their hands to tell her not to worry about it with wry smiles.

However, Kouki, of course, could not accept Kaori's words.

"It's a lie, right? After all, that's weird. Kaori has always been by my side… so shouldn't it be the same from now on too? Kaori is my childhood friend… that's why… it's natural for her to be by my side. Isn't that so, Kaori?"

"Umm… Kouki-kun. It is true that we are childhood friends… but, it doesn't mean we will be always together, you know? I think this is the natural way…"

"That's right, Kouki. It's not like Kaori is yours, and it's Kaori herself that will choose what she does. So, drop it already."

Being told so by his two childhood friends, Kouki was dumbfounded. His gaze immediately moved towards Hajime. Hajime was looking in the distance, expressing that this had nothing to do with him. Beside Hajime were a beautiful woman and beautiful girls in attendance. Seeing that spectacle, Kouki's eyes began to gradually looking up. Inside him, he was thinking about ***his*** Kaori, and dark feeling he never felt before sprang up. Thus following his impulse, he fully interpreted things at his own convenience.

"Kaori. You must not go with him. I am saying this for your sake. Just look at that Nagumo. He is attended by several girls, even a small child like that… moreover, he even made a girl from the Rabbitman tribe wear a slave collar. Even that black-haired woman called Hajime "Master" before. Surely, she was compelled to call him that. I am sure Nagumo is collecting women or something along those lines. He is the worst. He easily killed a person and he didn't want to cooperate with us, his comrades, even though he has those powerful weapons. Kaori, you'll only be unhappy if you go along with him. That's why, it is better if you stay here. No, just stay here. Even if you are going to hate me, I am going to stop you for your sake. I will absolutely not let you go with him!"

Kouki's overly erratic objection made Kaori and the others dumbfounded. However, the heated up Kouki couldn't be stopped. His gaze which was looking at Kaori to persuade her turned towards Yue and the girls by Hajime's side as if he thought of something.

"You girls, too. There's no more need for you to be by that man's side. Come with me! I welcome people with abilities like you. Let's save people together. Shia, was it?

There's no need to worry, I will immediately release you from slavery if you come with me. Tio too, it's okay for you to not call him Master."

Saying so with a refreshing smile, Kouki outstretched his hand towards Yue and the girls. Shizuku was facepalming and looking at the sky while Kaori was covering her opened mouth.

Yue and the girls who received the invitation along with Kouki's smile were…

"""" …""""

They were speechless. They averted their gazes from Kouki and rubbed both of their own arms. If one looked carefully, Yue and the girls were having goosebumps. In a way, they received considerable damage. Even Tio said, "Somehow, this feels wrong…," as she frowned at the cold feeling she felt.

Seeing their appearances, Kouki who outstretched his hand had his smile cramped. Far from looking at him, the girls were hurriedly hiding behind Hajime while looking disgustedly at him which shocked Kouki.

Then, that shock changed into anger which displayed in his action. He rashly drew the Holy Sword, aiming at Hajime. Kouki could no longer be stopped by words, he thrust the Holy Sword into the ground and pointed his finger at Hajime as he declared,

"Nagumo Hajime! Duel me! Throw away your weapon and fight me barehanded! If I win, don't ever come close to Kaori again! Also, you must release those girls!"

"… Ouch, ouch, ouch. This is bad. It's a more painful hero than I expected. It looks like he couldn't see that he is being a pain though."

"What are you mumbling about! Are you scared?!"

Stabbing the Holy Sword into the ground and declaring a bare-handed duel after drawing the sword was surely because he felt that he'd lose to Hajime if they used weapons. Though it was actually unknown whether he did it intentionally or not… Yue, Shia, Myuu, Tio, Kaori and the others were indeed taken aback by Kouki's speech and behavior.

However, Kouki firmly believed that he was in the right and got worked up on saving his childhood friend and the unhappy girls from Hajime which made him unable to notice the surrounding atmosphere. To begin with, the strong conviction that made him doing such a reckless thing was the "envy" he that he felt for the first time, and he was completely out of control.

Without hearing Hajime's approval, Kouki dashed out. Sighing, Hajime took two, three steps back. Seeing that, Kouki thought Hajime was frightened from fighting without a weapon and put more power into his dash. Just several steps before his fist reached Hajime, Hajime lowered his hands, not reacting to anything in particular. Kouki thought Hajime couldn't react to him and was convinced of his victory.

At that moment,

THUUUMP!

"Kh!?"

Kouki disappeared.

More accurately, at the moment he put maximum power to his last step to put more power into his fist, he fell. He fell into a pitfall. At the beginning, the reason Hajime moved back two, three steps was to create transmutation magic array using his shoes to create a hole with a four meter depth under the surface.

The pitfall was immediately returned into stone pavement after it swallowed Kouki. Next, explosions could be heard from under the surface. At the moment Hajime transmuted the pitfall, he used that opportunity to transfer flash grenade, shock grenade, paralyze grenade, and tear grenade from "Treasure Box" into the hole.

While he was underground, the impact from explosions attacked Kouki who tried to escape, then his vision went dark with the flash, his eyes and nose flooded from the tear grenade, and lastly his body was in agony and stiffening because of the paralysis.

Hajime silently used transmutation again and hardened the ground around Kouki as hard as the two-tailed wolf. And now, because he'd likely to die due to being deprived of fresh air, he created a small hole for ventilation.

During that time, to the onlookers, it looked like Hajime didn't do anything but stood only to take Kouki's resentment, and then Kouki rushed forward, alone which ended with him disappearing down the hole alone; it made him looked terribly… silly.

"Ah~, Yaegashi. He is still alive, so dig him out later."

"… I have a lot of things I want to ask… but, roger that."

Leave the troublesome Kouki to Yaegashi Shizuku!, it was a tacit understanding since the time they were in Japan. Hajime pushing the troublesome thing onto her made Shizuku leak a sigh while covering one of her eyes. Finally, the nuisance was gone.

… Was what he thought, but this time Hiyama's gang made a commotion. As for the reason, the hole left by Kaori was just too great. There was also the previous incident with the demon race woman, and they'd likely to die in the future if Kaori left them. That's why they repeatedly tried to persuade Kaori to remain with them. Especially Hiyama, he intensely objected. His appearance… was in a panic, as though the thing he desired for so long which was about to come into his possession was disappearing.

Hiyama's gang of four realized it was difficult to persuade or change Kaori's decision, and this time they began to persuade Hajime to remain with them. *We apologize about the past, so let's get along from now on*, such and so forth was said unabashedly.

They didn't actually mean what they said, but they made friendly smiles as they snuck peeks at Hajime's mood, but not only Hajime, but Shizuku and the others were also disgusted by them. Within that situation, Hajime, for the first time looked at Hiyama's eyes from a close distance since their reunion. Inside those eyes, maybe due to the effect of Kaori leaving, Hajime could see madness.

Shizuku and the others admonished Hiyama's gang and once again it turned into a commotion, but because there was such an opportunity, Hajime decided to talk to Hiyama to confirm the truth about that day and to resolve the current situation.

"Naa, Hiyama. Has your fire magic skill increased?"

"…Eh?"

The sudden question made Hiyama dumbfounded. However, his complexion gradually turned pale as he noticed the meaning behind it.

"Wh-What are you saying. I am the vanguard… and my element with the highest aptitude is Wind."

"Hee, I thought you were surely had a fire element."

"A-Aren't you mistaken? Just what are you trying to say all of a sudden…"

"Then, you must have liked fire element magic. Especially something like fireball. I wonder if you would unintentionally use it?"

"…"

Now, the color of Hiyama's face had changed from blue to white. Seeing that reaction, Hajime was convinced. Next, Hajime guessed his motive from his panicked attitude from Kaori separating from them. Well,as for why Hajime hadn't attacked Hiyama up till now was because he was sneaking looks at Kaori.

Hajime himself, currently, had not even a shred of feeling burning with revenge. Though he'd be merciless if one was hostile to him, he planned to leave Hiyama as he was. If he retaliated here, it would be troublesome as there was no value in being burdened by a dispute against Kouki's party just because of Hiyama. For Hajime, the existences of Hiyama and his gang were truly worthless just like the pebbles by the roadside.

Hajime moved away from the silent Hiyama and mercilessly informed Hiyama's gang, with Kondou and the others included.

"There's no need for you to apologize as I don't mind the past. For me, you guys are worthless. Thus I don't want to know what you are going to say. If you understand, scram now! You're so irritating!"

Although Kondou and the others were angered by Hajime's words, "Hiyamaaa. You should understand, right?," Hajime said so with full smile, and then Hiyama's body shook and he silently nodded, followed by him telling Kondou and the others to stop. Hiyama once again came to know that Hajime had noticed something about him, including what Hajime didn't express, and he matched him.

Kondou and the others were dubious due at the sudden change in Hiyama's attitude, but Hiyama's abnormal attitude, as if he was killing his emotions, made them reluctantly give up on persuading Hajime.

Finally, truly finally, the nuisances who disturbed the departure of Hajime's party had gone. Kaori went back to the inn to get her luggage (Hajime used his "Pressure" to stop Hiyama's gang from following her). Leering at Ryuutarou and the others trying to dig Kouki up, Hajime now was talking with Shizuku.

"What can I say… I am sorry for everything. Also, let me thank you again. Thank you, for saving us, for surviving, and for coming here to meet with Kaori…"

Shizuku, who apologized about the trouble and thanked him for rescuing them and returning to Kaori, made Hajime laugh, inadvertently. Shizuku showed a dubious expression due to Hajime sudden burst of laughter. Her gaze was asking, "What is it?"

"No, sorry. What can I say, I thought you are worldly-wise as usual, so I inadvertently laughed. Even while we were in Japan, you were the one who quietly did the apologizing and thanking. It's still the same, even in this different world… but keep it in moderation or your wrinkle will increase, you know?"

"… You've been a big help. Also, you have considerably changed. To have that many girls to wait upon you, along with a daughter… I couldn't imagine this from you while we were still in Japan…"

"I only love one person though…"

"… I don't have the obligation to say anything and I also understand that it is not my place to say it… but at least I want you to take care of Kaori. I implore you."

"…"

Hajime didn't answer. More than that he didn't want to answer Kaori's feelings, honestly, he never thought of letting her come along. But in the end, he let Yue have her way… but he wondered why the woman he fell for permitted one woman after another… *Why did it come to this?*, Hajime was looking into the far distance as he thought that he was spoiling Yue too much.

Towards Hajime, whose attitude said he didn't hear anything, Shizuku's spirit as a best friend raised a growl.

"… If you don't take care of her… it'll become serious matter."

" ? Serious matter? What do you…"

"Have you heard "White-haired, eye-patched Punisher"?"

"…What?"

"Or maybe, written as "Round of Destruction" and read as "Outbreak," how about it?"

"Wait a sec, you, just what are you…"

"There are also others such as "Jet-black Tyrant" or "Transmutation Master of Red Thunder," you know?"

"Y-Yo-You, don't tell me…"

Shizuku suddenly began to enumerate unknown names, which made Hajime look dubious at the beginning. But, noticing Shizuku joyfully looking at Hajime from head to toe, he turned pale as he understood what she meant.

"Fufufu, right now I am a "God's Apostle" and a member of the Hero's party. What I said will surely spread. It is equal to the network of neighboring housewives. Well then, Nagumo-kun, what kind of nickname do you want… I will make one that fairly describes your appearance and grandly make it known, okay?"

"Wait, just, wait! Why, how did you know such a damaging thing!?"

"It is because I studied about it with Kaori. That girl wanted to talk with Nagumo-kun, so she studied otaku culture like manga and anime so they could become a topic of conversation. I went along with her every time… that's why I've gathered quite the knowledge about it. Certainly, people like the current Nagumo-kun are called "chuuni…""

"Stoop-! Please stop that"

"O-Oh my, it is more effective than what I imagined… looks like you are aware of it yourself."

"Th-This devil…"

Hajime had already fallen to his knees. The black history that truly happened in his middle school years was revived. The memory that had been sealed deep inside him, "You rang?" said thus as it peeked out its face.

"Fufu, so, take care of Kaori, okay?"

"…"

"Fuu, Requiem of Ruin (Shotgun of Chaos), Revived Disaster (Reverse Calamity)…"

"Okay! I will do it, so please don't make such painful nicknames."

"Take care of Kaori, okay?"

"… At the very least, I promise that I won't treat her unkindly."

"Eeh, that's enough for me. After all, it seems you'll be mad at me if I go any further than this… if you break the promise, be prepared for a novel with you as the main character published in this world and Japan too, okay?"

"You, aren't you actually the last boss here? You are, right?"

Hajime held his head as he was on the verge of going mad from embarrassment. Yue, the girls, and the other classmates that were looking at Hajime from a slight distance were shuddering at how Shizuku used only words to make the overwhelmingly powerful Hajime fall to his knees.

While Hajime was fighting against his dark history due to this and that from his appearance, Kaori came back, running. Next, she became pop-eyed when she saw Hajime hanging his head before Shizuku.

Worried about Shizuku, Kaori asked the details from Yue and they exchanged information. Finishing their conversation, Yue, "Muu~," groaned at Shizuku who defeated Hajime with only words. Kaori had also remembered that the two often talked with each other quietly… and she looked alternately between Hajime and Shizuku. Following that, the two reached a conclusion. *Don't tell me, is she the last boss of this fight as a woman?*, something like that.

Yue wore an indescribable expression and Kaori was worrying. Then, it was finally time for Hajime's party to leave. Shizuku, Suzu, the other female students, and Nagayama's party, along with Meld who finished reporting, were gathered at Hol-ad's entrance to see them off. Following that, when Hajime took out the magic-driven four-wheeler, all of them were once again surprised.

While Shizuku and Kaori mutually struggling to separate their hands in regret, Hajime took out a sword with a black sheath from "Treasure Box" and handed it to Shizuku.

"This is?"

"Yaegashi, you are losing the one who can spoil you, right? Then, just take it. Even if you are worldly-wise, you can't be "healed (mentally)" from being separated from Shirasaki. Maa, there's also the various things I am indebted to you for from Japan."

Shizuku accepted the sword from Hajime and slowly drew it from its sheath, and a jet-black sword that seemed to absorb even light appeared. There was no blade crest, it had a slight curve and became double edged around the tip. It resembled the sword called Shoukarasuma. Though Hajime only knew a little about Japanese swords, it was created similarly using transmutation just like the short swords he handed over to the Haulia.

"I can guarantee its strength because it was made from the compressed, hardest ore in this world, and its sharpness is at the level where even an amateur can cut steel by swinging it. About the maintenance… there's no need to say it to Yaegashi, but please take care of it."

"… Such an amazing thing… as expected of a Transmutation Master. Thank you. I won't hold back and will accept it."

After one swing, two swings, the balance as it cut through the wind made Shizuku respond with admiration, and she honestly thanked him as she smiled. Truthfully, because Shizuku's swordsmanship was Yaegashi-styled, naturally it required a Japanese sword, and she felt disoriented every time she used her techniques using her previous sword. That's why she was truly happy to obtain a Katana which made her float a natural, lovely smile.

"… Last Boss?"

"… Shizuku-chan."

"Eh? What? You two, why are you looking at me with such eyes?"

Yue's gaze, full of caution, and Kaori's gaze, full of worry, made Shizuku flustered as she didn't know the meaning behind them. Leaving behind that indescribable atmosphere, Shizuku and the others saw Hajime's party out of Hol-ad.

The weather was good. Their destination was one of the Seven Great Dungeons «Guryuu-en Great Volcano» in «Guryuu-en Great Desert». With increasing liveliness from acquiring a new companion, Hajime continued his journey.

[End of Book 08]